DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 362 916 CS 508 350

TITLE	Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (76th, Kansas City, Missouri, August 11-14, 1993). Part IV: Television.
INSTITUTION	Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication.
PUB DATE	Aug 93
NOTE	252p.; For other sections of these proceedings, see CS 508 347-362. For 1992 proceedings, see ED 349 608-623.
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - Conference Proceedings (021)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC11 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Activism; *Broadcast Television; *Cable Television; Case Studies; Comparative Analysis; Competition; Job Layoff; *News Reporting; Television Research
IDENTIFIERS	Canada; *Local News; *Local Television Stations; Media Coverage; Paranormal Beliefs; Prime Time Television

ABSTRACT

The Television section of this collection of conference presentations contains the following eight papers: "Paying the Anchor in Local Television News: A Comparative Study of Priorities between General Managers and News Directors" (Craig Allen); "The 'Cutting Edge' in Local Television News: Revisiting Layoffs, Staff Reductions, and Downsizing 'Mythology'" (Craig Allen); "The Daily Race to See Who's Best: Competition, Control, and Newswork" (Matthew C. Ehrlich); "Who Owns Prime Time?: The Political Economy of Television Program and Broadcast Rights" (Ronald V. Bettig); "Protest in the News: Images of Protesters in Canadian and U.S. Network News" (James H. Wittebols); "News from the Non-Institutional World: U.S. and Canadian Television News Coverage of Social Protest" (James H. Wittebols); "Do Televised Depictions of Paranormal Events Influence Viewers' Paranormal Beliefs?" (Glenn G. Sparks and others); and "Local Cable Television Commentary, Boosterism and Community Ties: A Case Study of Council Bluffs, Iowa 1989-90" (Jeremy Harris Lipschultz). (RS)

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PROCEEDINGS OF THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR EDUCATION IN JOURNALISM AND MASS COMMUNICATION (76TH, KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI, AUGUST 11-14, 1993). PART IV: TELEVISION.

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RADIO-TELEVISION JOURNALISM DIVISION

Paying the Anchor in Local Television News:

A Comparative Study of Priorities Between General Managers and News Directors

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Paying the Anchor in Local Television News:

A Comparative Study of Priorities Between General Managers and News Directors

ABSTRACT

As local television stations downsize their news operations, an important question is whether management views anchor salaries as a budget-cutting option. Anchor salaries can represent 10 percent of a news operating budget although this expense mainly defrays a talent fee, not an investment in journalistic commitment. A national study that compared the budget priorities of affiliate general managers and news directors found that anchor salaries have been and will remain unaffected by news downsizing. Both groups agreed that ratings determine the health of a news operation and that anchors contribute more to profitability than non-anchors. While management is somewhat concerned by "runaway" anchor salaries, it may reduce salaries of some non-anchors to attract a promising "star." The study pointed to a need for more research that assesses managers, particularly news directors, on tradeoffs between journalistic and commercial investments in the newsroom.

Paying the Anchor in Local Television News:

A Comparative Study of Priorities Between General Managers and News Directors

An important matter in local television journalism is whether the salaries of anchors will be effected as stations "downsize" their news operations. One half of local TV newsrooms enacted budget cuts in 1990-91, with virtually all of these cuts having involved either the elimination of news positions or the paring down of editorial services.[1] Some predict further reductions as the revenues of local stations are threatened by increased competition in the marketplace.[2] With less being spent on news, questions surround what Jacobs called the "runaway salaries" of news anchors.[3] Former CBS News President Fred Friendly has proposed that local stations could resolve many of their budget anxieties and still keep their news commitments in tact by reducing the salaries of just a handful of anchors.[4]

Anchors, referred to in the trade as "talent" and hired to host broadcasts, are on average paid three times more than reporters, producers, and editors.[5] These averages suggest that a station needing to sizably cut expenses could indeed do so reducing anchor pay. A similar case could be made from the 1992 estimate of Don Fitzpatrick Associates, a leading talent consultant, that the salaries paid a station's weeknight anchors (news, weather, and sports) can comprise 10 percent of newsroom operating expenses.[6]

While the literature has established economic uncertainty and the sacrifice of news-related personnel and services, there has been no systematic attempt aimed at determining whether managers expect anchors to share the sacrifice. This study, the first direct comparison of TV general managers and news directors to be derived from national data, was such an attempt. Identical questionnaires were sent to each of the nation's affiliate general managers and news directors. Findings reflect an overall response of 63 percent.

General managers and news directors were compared because these figures jointly allocate news resources. Of interest in the study was preceding evidence that general managers and news directors may have conflicting views as to how much of the resource should be spent on news presentation. General managers, because their first concern is profitability, must ensure high ratings and thus are shown to favor anchors, believing them to be "drawing cards" for viewers. News directors, if not resistant to judging journalistic endeavors by ratings, have upheld news coverage, not news presentation, as the main reason people watch. News directors supervise the contributions of all news workers, not just anchors, and thus may question the anchor's compensation, particularly because the jobs of many non-anchors have been lost in cutbacks.

While differences were expected, few were found. Both general managers and news directors held ratings as a goal and agreed that anchors contribute more to this goal than other news workers. Both, while rejecting some options for directly diverting news gathering resources into presentation, tentatively agreed they would hire future non-anchor news workers at decreasing salaries to free resources for promising anchors. The study sought to determine if newsrooms are "autonomous" or if the hand of upper management reaches into them at an appreciable degree. Findings suggested the latter. News directors agreed that general managers establish the anchor's share of resources and, thus, what is left to cover all of the other expenses required in news gathering. Evidence that anchors are not a budget-cutting option were affirmed in expectations that anchor salaries will grow proportionally to those of non-anchors in the years ahead.

Background

Interest in anchor salaries has evolved from industry reports that document major income disparities between anchor and non-anchor personnel. Between 1981 and 1991, top anchors at affiliates saw an average annual salary increase, adjusted for inflation, of 10.8 percent. By contrast,

reporters in real terms lost money and were paid an average of 4.5 percent less each year. In 1991, primary anchors were paid an average of $86,005, more than three times the $25,405 paid reporters and the $23,660 paid producers. There were greater disparities between anchors and non-anchors in the twenty-five largest markets. There, top anchors earned an average of $232,500, compared to around $57,000 for reporters and $40,000 each for producers, assignment editors, and videographers. Another person paid less than the anchor was the news director. Across all stations, the news director's 1991 average salary of $52,760 was two-thirds that of primary anchors.[7] Weaver and Wilhoit's studies have likewise shown that the salaries of most journalists were "eroded seriously" during the 1980s.[8]

Although anchors are active in editorial and managerial tasks, it is accepted that their value to TV stations has relatively little to do with their journalistic contributions. Powers and Matusow each maintained that many anchors are commercial elements, not unlike the hosts or "stars" of entertainment programs, whose outward displays of charisma and on-set theatrics maximize ratings.[9] Sanders and Pritchett affirmed that the "non verbal communication" of anchors could "play a role in determining which [newscast] the viewer will select."[10] Cathcart's study reached a similar conclusion.[11] In research investigating a phenomenon known as "parasocial interaction," Levy, Houlberg, Rubin, and Perse, in different studies, found that viewers may watch local news broadcasts for a vicarious "bonding" with anchors. Levy's study saw commercial implications in this bonding and speculated that anchors "may deliberately manipulate their self-presentation" in order to "attract large audiences."[12]

While there is some evidence that viewers attend news broadcasts in the expectation of seeing certain anchors, there is no conclusive evidence that viewers do not also seek an intake of news and information. Lin, in fact, demonstrated that anchors were less important than the "quality and scope of local news" in drawing viewers to particular programs.[13]

Because the quality and scope of local news, as well as the quality of the anchors, is determined by the economic resources they command--and because these resources are limited--an important matter is how general managers and news directors establish respective budgetary priorities.

Past studies indicate that general managers would favor quality anchors and treat news quality as a lesser priority. While likely unfamiliar with scholarly studies, general managers commission their own audience research. A study of this commercial research by Shosteck indicated that it, like the "parasocial" research, elevates anchors as elements to which viewers react.[14] This commercial research may validate the GM's personal impression, noted by Turow, that "hosts" instill an outward "identity" and "feeling of unity" in a broadcast.[15] That anchors are easily isolated as "drawing cards" is meaningful to a general manager, whose job security hinges on station profitability; Wicks found that news operations can account for 50 percent of station profits.[16] While a general manager may personally prefer a newscast rich in substance and detail, the ratings become the practical measure of news vitality to a GM. Because an anchor's cosmetics and delivery key the outward appearance of the news, it might not matter to a general manager if the anchor had a college degree or editorial experience.

Another meaningful factor to the general manager is that mainly through on-air talent is upper management able to facilitate decision-making in news that is analogous to that elsewhere in its domain. Most general managers advance not from news but from sales and programming departments, where replacing programs is a routine activity.[17] Anchors are enlisted much the way whole programs are purchased, on a short term often with two-year contracts. A GM thus can "cancel" an anchor if that person fails to stimulate ratings. Yet an anchor capable of luring more viewers like a "hit show" could be worth a substantial investment. Several have noted that because ratings to a general manager are never "high enough" there exists in television news a perpetual talent hunt for anchors. A third party that includes agents and consultants bids up the price for promising anchor talent.[18] This

competitive environment may require GMs to reserve a large share of news resource for finding new anchors and/or keeping popular existing anchors.

While general managers may favor quality anchors, past studies suggest that news directors would invest maximum resources on quality news coverage. Some studies further hint that news directors do not uphold ratings and disagree that profit margins must be calculated prior to every investment. Weaver and Wilhoit found that most news managers had advanced through positions in newsrooms, where "altruism" and public service are goals. These authors explained that those in newsrooms become alienated when their "autonomous" goals must be sacrificed to those of the "total organization," such as when newsrooms must work with other corporate units "toward the common goal of increased profitability."[19] Stone characterized TV news directors as "highly comparable" to newspaper managing editors, not corporate figures.[20] Wulfemeyer provided similar evidence after news directors in a national survey expressed to him "almost unanimous . . . support for the ideals of fair, balanced and accurate reporting."[21] These studies suggest that news directors, unlike general managers, would favor if not demand newscasts rich in substance and would use resources to attract news workers with college educations and past editorial experience.

Additional evidence has shown that news directors to the extent they evaluate ratings may agree with Lin that the influence of anchors in drawing viewers is overrated. News directors complained when with commercial research, consultants, and agents the "star system" emerged in local news in the 1970s.[22] The Weaver-Wilhoit study, moreover, addressed the matter of "entertaining the audience" and found those in television "among the least likely to acknowledge entertainment as important."[23] That news directors stress news gathering, not "entertaining" anchors, as a means of staking a position in the marketplace was affirmed, although not unanimously, in Jacobs' informal survey. In this study, reported in 1990, news directors tended to view the ratings contributions of reporters and producers as at least comparable to those of anchors. Accordingly, some news directors

professed to a "hard-nosed" approach in future anchor salary negotiations because they wanted the "money to go into the product, not [to] the presenter."[24]

The literature thus points to opposing perspectives between general managers and news directors and the basis of a disagreement over what proportion of a limited news resource should be spent on news presentation.

Acknowledging these differences, trade sources beginning in the late 1980s hinted that extreme positions had narrowed. In articles that sketched a "managerial marriage," the Radio-Television News Directors Association found general managers more reflective of the journalistic integrity of their newscasts and news directors more attuned with their commercial imperatives.[25] Yet there has been no systematic attempt to test how far one side may have ventured toward seeing "eye to eye" with other. Anchor salaries, because they define a trade between the journalistic and commercial interests of these two types of decision-makers, qualify as a base for such a test.

The study proposed that:

(1) Affiliate general managers are more likely than news directors to view ratings as the most important determinant of a news operation's health.

(2) General managers consider anchors more essential to attracting viewers than reporters, feature reporters, videographers, producers, and assignment editors. News directors associate the viewer's news-viewing motive with the news itself and consider those in journalistic positions more essential to attracting viewers than anchors.

(3) General managers stress demonstrated performance capabilities and thus favor investments in commericial audience research; they also are willing to terminate an anchor if the anchor's performance fails within three years to boost ratings. News directors will reject the use of commercial research and disfavor the anchor "revolving door."

(4) General managers are less likely than news directors to seek anchors who have journalistic experience and a college degree.

(5) In a hypothetical situation of budgetary conflict, general managers will prioritize the anchor and favor the sacrifice of other parts of a newsroom budget. News directors will not prioritize the anchor and will reject all options for accommodating an anchor that involve news-related cuts.

(6) General managers are less likely than news directors to question anchor salaries and more likely to anticipate greater salary disparities.

(7) General managers will agree that they, not the news director, select anchors and determine their salaries. Because anchors are employed in newsrooms and their salaries are part of a newsroom budget they directly supervise, news directors will disagree that GMs exert this control.

Methodology

Identical questionnaires were sent to every non-satellite affiliate, one each to the general manager and news director. The sample was limited to affiliates because these stations comprise 83 percent of the local TV stations engaged in news.[26] A preliminary telephone survey revealed that twenty-one affiliates had dropped news operations, leaving 541 affiliates in the final sample. Of the 1,082 questionnaires sent, 688 were returned, providing a total response rate of 63 percent. The responses within the groups were almost equal: 64 percent among general managers and 63 percent among news directors. The questionnaire was pre-tested among general managers and news directors in state that had affiliates in all market-size categories. The data collection occurred between June and August 1992.

Respondents were instructed to affirm or refute items based on a nine-point scale, in which "1" corresponded to "Strongly Disagree" and "9" to "Strongly Agree." The means of the responses are reported across all stations and by four market-size categories; differences were analyzed with t tests.

To test the hypothesis that general managers place greater stock in the ratings than news directors, the groups responded to item that read, "Ratings are most important in determining the health of your news operation." To test the hypothesis that the public, in the view of the general managers, watches the news for the anchors, and that news directors believe journalism is the public's primary viewing motive, the two groups responded to an item that read, "In determining ratings, anchors are essential." The two groups then assessed the extent reporters, feature reporters, videographers, producers, and assignment editors are essential to ratings.

The hypothesis that general managers and news directors differ on the importance of performance abilities was tested in a two-part series of items. The first part sought reaction to the use of commercial research and consultants in evaluating anchors; the second part sought to determine how long an anchor would be allowed to remain on the air if performance abilities did not improve ratings. The hypothesis that general managers are less likely to conceive writing-reporting experience and a college degree as important in anchor selection was tested with items worded accordingly.

To test the hypothesis that general managers are more likely to enlarge the share of the anchor resources by reducing the proportion spent on news gathering, the two groups were given items that read, "If you are determined to enlist or keep a promising anchor and the money necessary has not been budgeted, you would . . . ." The groups were then given budget-cutting options that included reducing capital expenditures, denying raises to non-anchors, not filling non-anchor openings, filling future openings with part-time staff, filling future openings with fulltime staff at reduced salary, and layoffs.

The hypotheses that general managers are less likely to question anchor salaries, are more likely to anticipate larger anchor salaries, and are more likely to affirm their aegis over salaries, were tested with items so worded.

Results

The purpose of the study was to determine the intensity of expected differences between general managers and news directors based on several items relating to anchors. While some differences were found, only two of seven hypotheses were firmly supported. The failure of other hypotheses was most often the result of unexpected responses among the news directors.

Hypothesis 1, that general managers are more likely than news directors to stress ratings, was supported, as shown in the first item in Table 1. A surprise, though, was the intensity of feeling among news directors that ratings do determine news health. While their responses differed significantly from the general manager's, the news directors clearly agreed that ratings were the chief determinant; their mean on the nine-point scale was 6.06, higher still among those in the larger markets.

Hypothesis 2, that general managers view anchors as more essential to ratings that those in other news work categories, and that news directors have opposite feelings, was rejected. As remaining items in Table 1 show, both groups overwhelming agreed, and with no significant differences, that the anchor is essential to viewership, an expected outcome among general managers but another surprise among news directors, whose mean was 8.05 overall and 8.45 in the top-25 markets. The only significant differences emerged in the producer and videographer items; news directors upheld the contributions of these employees more intensely than general managers. Both groups strongly agreed that non-anchors are essential to ratings; the extent the general managers did so was unanticipated. Yet in no case did the intensity of feeling for a non-anchor exceed that of an anchor. Because this was an unexpected response among the news directors, an additional statistical analysis was performed in which the news directors' anchor item means were paired against those of the non-anchors. The t values appear in Table 2. In virtually every comparison, the anchor means significantly differed.

Hypothesis 3, that general managers would be more inclined than news directors to invest in the evaluation of an anchor's on-air performance and replace an anchor whose performance did not increase ratings was rejected. As Table 3 shows, both groups agreed that research on anchors, both formal and informal, was important. Both groups, moreover, had almost identical sentiment on anchor longevity. There was agreement in both groups that an anchor whose performance failed to stimulate ratings should be replaced after two years, more intense feeling that the axe should fall after three years.

There was support for Hypothesis 4, that general managers are less attracted to an anchor's journalistic experience and education (Table 4). The intensity of feeling among news directors that anchors need writing (8.09) and reporting (8.08) experience was noteworthy.

Yet Hypothesis 5, that GMs would favor sacrificing other parts of a news budget, and that news directors would oppose such sacrifices, had only partial support (Table 5). General managers joined news directors in refusing to accommodate anchors by laying off non-anchors, denying non-anchor raises, and cutting capital expenditures. General managers did agree, although slightly, that anchors could be accommodated by hiring more part-timers and not filling non-anchor openings; news directors rejected those options. Nevertheless, they both agreed that a promising anchor could be accommodated by hiring new employees at lower pay than their predecessors. While neither group intensely agreed with this option, there was indication that news directors, contrary to expectations, may have some mind to divert resources from journalism into presentation.

Hypothesis 6, regarding the direction and perceived status of anchor salaries, likewise had mixed support (Table 6). The two groups differed significantly as to the future direction of anchor salaries; general managers expressed positive sentiment (6.18) that anchor salaries will increase in proportion to non-anchors, while news directors (5.42) were less willing to agree. Yet there was no significant difference in their respective concerns about this trend. Both groups are concerned but

news directors (5.78) were only nominally more bothered than general managers (5.65). Affirming a mutual vote of confidence in high anchor salaries was intense disagreement among both groups that anchors contribute little to the news.

Finally, Hypothesis 7 was rejected, as the final two items in Table 6 indicate. While there was little evidence that general managers have more influence than news directors in deciding just who anchors the news, this does appear to be a joint decision. Yet with no significant difference general managers (7.09) and news directors (6.85) clearly agreed that general managers decide what the anchors are paid.

Discussion

Debate endures between those who conceive local television news as a journalistic service and others who consider it more as a form of public entertainment. There have been few attempts aimed at determining how television managers, who allocate the financial resources available to news, may view this journalism-entertainment question. The study showed that both in the newsroom and in the executive suite the contributions of those who photograph, report, and prepare the news are acknowledged. Management expects even its anchors to make some of these contributions. Thus top managers do highly regard the journalistic integrity of their news programs.

Yet the study provided some of the first systematic evidence that both general managers and news directors also embrace an entertainment dimension, in the form of the charismatic and audience-appealing news "star." Managers believe that ratings best gauge the health of a local TV news operation and that anchors are more essential to ratings than those in any other news work category. Management is comfortable with putting into anchor salaries a share of resources that would otherwise defray news gathering. This share may represent only about 10 percent of news operating resources but is nonetheless considerable. Moreover, management expects the anchor's share to increase, at a

time when total resources available to local TV stations are diminishing. While the study was limited to items relating to anchors, the results challenge claims that managers conceive news broadcasts exclusively as journalistic services.

An important subject for further investigation are the anchors themselves. Evidence that managers appraise an anchor's editorial experience expands on recent observations that anchors, because of cutbacks, must increasingly write, report, and produce the news. What seems a relevant research question are the motivations of anchors in executing editorial tasks when such tasks reward others a fraction of the anchor's pay. The study also suggests a need for more audience effects studies on anchors, including those that shed light on the phenomenon of "parasocial interaction." While anchors may make editorial contributions, the anchor's performance abilities are clearly what count to managers; the large difference in pay between an anchor and a non-anchor is without doubt a measure of the priority TV stations place on performance. Management appears not only acquainted with the "bonding effect" that some scholars have proposed; it is willing to expend additional news resources on telephone surveys, auditorium screenings, and focus groups to determine which anchors bond and which do not. Even in the small markets both general managers and news directors agree that these investments are necessary.

The general manager, whose job is to ensure profits and who may have no background in news, has influence in directing news operations in local television. Here it was shown that GMs set anchor salaries and are active in anchor hiring decisions. These findings are consistent with recent evidence that a "managerial marriage" now exists between general managers and news directors. More may need to be known of this "marriage" because it questions Weaver and Wilhoit's finding, from their research in the early 1980s, that "journalists still perceive substantial autonomy in their work."[27]

A case the journalists may not have complete autonomy is further supported by the responses of the news directors. News directors reacted similarly to the GMs. News directors, like GMs, hold ratings as the determinant of news health, are not greatly concerned that non-anchors earn a fraction of the anchor's pay, are comfortable with a talent "revolving door," and may be willing to pay anchors more by cutting news expenditures elsewhere. These unexpected results may indicate the prevalance of a type of news director different from that generally recognized in scholarly literature. Less autonomous and compelled into a union with general managers, news directors increasingly may be swayed that profit-making is central to news endeavors and may leave a newsroom's journalistic well-being to subordinates. Stone found many news directors uncomfortable with "managerial activities" and linked this discomfort to their high turnover from average tenures of around two years.[28] However, a sizable number of news directors may welcome the conversion. A 1987 RTNDA study reported that 56 percent of news directors aspired to be general managers.[29]

One step toward a better portrayal of news directors would be further attempts to test them not only on their news judgment and journalistic priorities but by tradeoffs between journalistic and commercial factors. Decisions that have accompanied this field's downsizing are rich in tradeoff variables. One tradeoff may pertain to the extent news directors favor the reduction of reporting positions and "filling" local newscasts with inexpensive nationally-syndicated material and video news releases. Another tradeoff is the extent news directors favor the adding of newscasts without the addition of news staff. Yet another tradeoff pertains to the extent news directors favor the replacement of fulltime staff with part-timers and those who can be hired on a per-diem basis. These tradeoffs and others were described in a national study of downsizing reported in 1992 by the RTNDA.[30]

If local newsrooms continue to operate in an uncertain economic environment, the anchor's large salary will remain another key tradeoff. There was little evidence in this study to indicate that recent economic restraint effects the "star system" in local TV news. To the contrary, the "star" may

assume greater importance in the years ahead as management faces increasing ratings challenges in a now congested TV marketplace. Resources that defray presentation and journalism draw from the same trough; as anchor pay goes up, news gathering resources may be forced down. Thus an important research pursuit in local TV news is following the money. Doing so may help determine what management has in mind in offering local TV news services to the public.

TABLE 1

Differences Between GM's and ND's Assessment of Ratings and Employees

("1" Strongly Disagree, "9" Strongly Agree)

	ALL STATIONS		ADI 1-25		ADI 26-50		ADI 51-100		ADI 101-208	
Item	GM Mean	ND Mean	GM Mean	ND Mean	GM Mean	ND Mean	GM Mean	ND Mean	GM Mean	ND Mean
Ratings Determine Health of News Operation	6.93	6.06***	6.78	6.25	7.16	6.10**	7.09	6.19***	6.82	5.89***
Anchors Essential to Ratings	7.98	8.05	7.91	8.45*	8.42	8.30	8.25	8.21	7.70	7.40
Producers Essential to Ratings	7.50	7.76*	7.58	7.82	7.77	7.98	7.54	7.90*	7.38	7.59
Assignment Editors Essential to Ratings	7.42	7.62	7.19	7.66	7.69	7.55	7.45	7.74	7.39	7.54
Reporters Essential to Ratings	6.86	6.97	6.37	7.11*	7.06	7.05	6.87	6.91	6.96	6.93
Videographers Essential to Ratings	6.58	6.85*	6.35	6.81*	6.83	7.18	6.53	6.91*	6.61	6.70
Feature Reporters Essential to Ratings	6.17	5.90	5.85	5.93	6.62	5.90	6.11	5.95	6.26	5.80
	n=351	n=337	n=46	n=46	n=48	n=40	n=99	n=101	n=158	n=150

T-Test Probabilities
* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

TABLE 2

Anchors Versus Other Employees as "Essential to Ratings,"

Comparison of News Director Means

Pair	ALL STATIONS T-Value	ADI 1-25 T-Value	ADI 26-50 T-Value	ADI 51-100 T-Value	ADI 101-208 T-Value
Anchors-Producers	4.08***	3.34**	2.01	2.63*	1.34
Anchor-Assignment Editors	4.96***	3.61***	2.91**	3.36**	1.46
Anchor-Reporters	12.53***	6.81***	5.40***	8.49***	5.92***
Anchor-Videographers	12.07***	6.23***	6.14***	7.66***	6.21***
Anchors-Feature Reporters	20.09***	8.49***	6.85***	12.12***	12.09***

Probabilities
* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

TABLE 3

Differences Between GMs and NDs Regarding On-Air Evaluation

And Longevity of Anchor Who Fails to Increase Ratings

("1" Strongly Disagree, "9" Strongly Agree)

	ALL STATIONS		ADI 1-25		ADI 26-50		ADI 51-100		ADI 101-208	
Item	GM Mean	ND Mean	GM Mean	ND Mean	GM Mean	ND Mean	GM Mean	ND Mean	GM Mean	ND Mean
Phone surveys, auditorium screenings important	6.52	6.30	7.08	6.68	7.13	7.38	6.72	6.26	6.03	5.94
Informal impressions important	6.88	7.38***	6.78	7.61*	7.15	7.68	6.66	7.20*	6.96	7.34
Consultants important	5.55	5.21	6.21	5.75	5.89	6.13	5.76	5.45	5.12	4.63
Terminate in one year	3.96	3.50	3.58	2.95	3.42	2.97	3.48	3.12	4.53	4.03
Terminate in two years	5.65	5.42	5.74	5.27	5.33	5.18	6.07	5.22	5.45	5.65
Terminate in three years	6.19	6.32	7.09	6.86	6.44	7.34	6.51	6.16	5.65	5.95
	n=351	n=337	n=46	n=46	n=48	n=40	n=99	n=101	n=158	n=150

T-Test Probabilities
* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

TABLE 4

Differences Between GMs and NDs Regarding Anchor's Background

("1" Strongly Disagree, "9" Strongly Agree)

	ALL STATIONS		ADI 1-25		ADI 26-50		ADI 51-100		ADI 101-208	
Item	GM Mean	ND Mean	GM Mean	ND Mean	GM Mean	ND Mean	GM Mean	ND Mean	GM Mean	ND Mean
Anchors need writing skill	7.74	8.09***	7.35	7.68	7.36	8.30**	7.77	7.98	7.94	8.22*
Anchors need reporting skill	7.78	8.08**	7.71	7.82	7.53	8.18*	7.83	8.11	7.83	8.13*
Anchors need college degree	6.15	6.48*	6.11	5.45	5.87	6.93*	6.10	6.70*	6.29	6.53
	n=351	n=337	n=46	n=46	n=48	n=40	n=99	n=101	n=158	n=150

T-Test Probabilities
* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

TABLE 5

Differences Between GM's and ND's Acceptance of Budget-Cutting Options

For Paying Promising Anchors

("1" Strongly Disagree, "9" Strongly Agree)

	ALL STATIONS		ADI 1-25		ADI 26-50		ADI 51-100		ADI 101-208	
Item	GM Mean	ND Mean	GM Mean	ND Mean	GM Mean	ND Mean	GM Mean	ND Mean	GM Mean	ND Mean
Layoff of Non-Anchor	2.79	2.15***	2.91	2.58	2.96	1.98**	2.69	1.98**	2.77	2.16**
Cut Capital Expenditures	3.13	3.80***	2.96	3.86*	3.02	3.43	3.12	3.58	3.21	4.02**
Deny Raises of Non-Anchors	3.18	3.27	2.69	3.70*	2.97	3.23	2.87	3.00	3.57	3.29
Hire More Part-Timers	5.18	4.81*	5.26	5.86	5.30	4.95	5.18	4.40*	5.12	4.73
Not Fill Non-Anchor Openings	5.26	5.28	5.26	5.65	5.26	4.95	5.28	5.26	5.25	5.24
Hire Future Fulltime Non-Anchors at Lower Pay	6.19	6.32	7.09	6.86	6.44	7.34	6.51	6.16	5.65	5.95
	n=351	n=337	n=46	n=46	n=48	n=40	n=99	n=101	n=158	n=150

T-Test Probabilities
* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

TABLE 6

Differences Between GMs and NDs on Future Direction, Assessment,

And Control of Anchor Salaries

("1" Strongly Disagree, "9" Strongly Agree)

	ALL STATIONS		ADI 1-25		ADI 26-50		ADI 51-100		ADI 101-208	
Item	GM Mean	ND Mean	GM Mean	ND Mean	GM Mean	ND Mean	GM Mean	ND Mean	GM Mean	ND Mean
Proportion paid anchors will increase	6.18	5.42**	6.24	4.63**	6.02	4.90*	6.18	5.20**	6.22	5.89
Disproportional anchor salaries a concern	5.65	5.78	6.54	6.23	6.17	6.63	5.64	6.00	5.24	5.25
Anchors contribute little to news	2.99	2.97	2.52	2.58	3.14	2.65	2.94	3.34	2.83	2.93
GM, not ND, decides who will anchor	5.12	4.24***	4.84	3.66*	4.74	4.10	5.03	4.81	5.39	4.07***
GM, not ND, sets anchor salaries	7.09	6.85	7.31	6.12**	6.87	6.85	7.02	6.86	7.13	7.05
	n=351	n=337	n=46	n=46	n=48	n=40	n=99	n=101	n=154	n=150

T-Test Probabilities
* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

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MEDIA MANAGEMENT AND ECONOMICS DIVISION

The "Cutting Edge" in Local Television News:

Revisiting Layoffs, Staff Reductions, and Downsizing "Mythology"

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Presented at AEJMC Annual Convention, Kansas City, MO, August 1993.

The "Cutting Edge" in Local Television News:

Revisiting Layoffs, Staff Reductions, and Downsizing "Mythology"

Abstract

An important matter facing media managers are staff reductions in local TV news. A survey that brought response from 63 percent of the nation's affiliate news managers, and was the first attempt to isolate reductions by job categories, revealed that 31 percent of respondents eliminated some news staff in 1991-92. Almost 650 newsroom positions were lost in that period and several news departments were eliminated. The study tempers conclusions of trade sources that the local TV news work force enjoys a period of growth. Instead, because of audience fragmentation, there may be a "cleavage" among affiliates in which some upgrade commitments to news while others reduce their news commitments. Affiliate managers inclined to reduce news commitments warrant more scholarly study because affiliates are the dominant source of local broadcast news. More study is also needed because trade sources may not fully depict the extent of economic retrenchment in this sector of the mass media.

The "Cutting Edge" in Local Television News:

Revisiting Layoffs, Staff Reductions, and Downsizing "Mythology"

Layoffs and staff reductions in local television news comprise a subject worthy of expanded scholarly investigation. Decisions to terminate employees are among the most momentous ever made in a newsroom, and potentially represent not just a human toll and lost operational capacity but also a step backward in the quality of journalism that flows to the public. That the public relies on these TV news workers, and their daily presentations of local news, has been established in polling data and other studies.[1] For scholars engaged in the study of media management, work force matters are of special interest. Employment is a key economic indicator and its fluctuations are used to interpret whether an enterprise is growing or contracting. Such fluctuations can determine the career aspirations of those taught by scholars. In mass communications studies, growing numbers of students are seeking careers in broadcast journalism. Many others pursue broadcast management, a field that can revolve around news operations.

Some light was shed on the status of the broadcast news work force in April 1992, when the Radio-Television News Directors Association published a report affirming that a pattern of staff reductions did in fact exist.[2] The data covered a 1990-91 period and reflected a survey of the nation's news directors, of which 53 percent responded. The RTNDA found that one-half of local news operations had been forced by economic conditions to reduce expenses; the action taken most often was staff cuts. According to the RTNDA, 32.8 percent of all stations and 36.2 percent of affiliates had taken this drastic step.

This RTNDA research venture marked the first attempt to collect national data aimed at confronting the unsettling but very important matter of news "downsizing." It was a logical step for the RTNDA, which sponsors the only continuing research on economic trends in local TV news.

Because the RTNDA has been the major source of such information, its results and interpretations are widely cited in scholarly literature.

Yet many of the interpretations in its April 1992 report were unclear, particularly when compared to other findings the RTNDA later published. Two months after its downsizing report found budget cuts at one-half of stations, the RTNDA released another survey indicating that almost three-fourths of local stations turned profits on news. While these profits according to the RTNDA symbolized the field's vitality, an alternative explanation--that profits were boosted by the previously reported budget cuts--was not considered.[3] Also uncertain was an RTNDA work force survey published just one month after the downsizing report. While the RTNDA placed one-third of stations in the "staff cuts" column in April, it portrayed a stable local TV news work force, with sizable expansions in some markets, in May.[4] To reconcile the April 1992 findings with those it published in May, the RTNDA concluded that gains in some stations were so large that they offset losses in all of the others, such that the notion of "downsizing" had the dimensions of a "myth."

While the RTNDA's April 1992 downsizing report broke ground, it left questions because it made no distinction between the total group of stations and the smaller group affected by the cutbacks. As in the past, the RTNDA's interpretation of industry well-being was based on across-the-board national averages. That the work force was growing was important but no more important than evidence of an opposite trend at one of every three facilities. Because the proportion of stations in the RTNDA's "affected" category was so large, there was an indication that more was involved than simple offsetting symmetry, that stations may be splitting into different groups based on the extent they plan to commit to news in the future. The RTNDA may not have focused on this possibility in April 1992 because its intent then was to test what it called "anecdotal evidence," local press reports, magazine articles, and word-of-mouth accounts, that have described layoffs of reporters, writers, and videographers, often a dozen at a time, in many of the nation's local newsrooms. Although the

RTNDA's national data brought perspective to a preponderance of anecdotal evidence, the fact that layoffs continued after its report hinted that a complete picture of this field's economic health had yet to be drawn.

With an eye to one conclusion consistent in this diverse evidence--that the stakes in news staffing reductions are very high for employees and viewers alike--this study was an attempt to probe further. The aim was collecting new data that could answer more fundamental questions not addressed in the previous research. These questions included: how many positions were lost, what were they, and were the affected positions related to their perceived contribution to news profitability? Reported here are descriptive data from 63 percent of affiliate news directors that assess staffing activity between mid-1991 and mid-1992. These data support some of the RTNDA's earlier downsizing findings. Yet staff reductions in 1991-92 were of sufficient magnitude to suggest the field is dealing with whether, economically, the glass is half-empty or half-full. Local news is growing, but growth may be a selective phenomenon.

Background

Although observers have only recently sought to study job displacements in local TV news, scholars have given much attention to newer economic factors that may explain them. Central to this analysis is that the vast majority of TV stations engaged in coverage of local news are affiliates of ABC, CBS, or NBC. In 1991, 83 percent of news-active television stations were so affiliated.[5] Eighty-five percent of local TV journalists were employed by these stations.[6] McKean and Stone affirmed that local news, while having only scattered acceptance at independent TV stations and many types of radio stations, was common at affiliates of the three largest TV networks.[7] Local news took root at affiliates not because it was initially profitable but because affiliates had means to nurture it, using the huge profits that accumulated from the ties they had with their networks. Through the 1970s, the

public had few alternatives to networks and affiliates. That decade, when affiliate-network television commanded 90 percent of the audience, affiliate revenues increased an average of 20 percent each year.[8] The most lucrative period in affiliate television were the years between 1977 and 1981, a period that also may have marked the economic "heyday" of local TV news, as witnessed by a 46 percent expansion in the news work force in those four years.[9]

The relationship between local news and the fortunes of the network-affiliate system worked in reverse amid the marketplace upheaval in the 1980s. Because of competition from cable, new TV stations, and other video alternatives, the network share of the audience had fallen to 65 percent by 1989, helping explain why affiliates between 1981 and 1989 lost between 10 and 15 percent of their own audiences and saw annual rates of revenue growth slow to around seven percent.[10] It was at this time, beginning in 1986, that the first major layoffs were reported in local newsrooms.

In explaining this relationship between a "channel revolution," fragmented audiences, declines at networks and affiliates, and, ultimately, economic cutbacks in local news, scholars have explored two possibilities. One notion is that new media directly draw down the viewership of local news. Webster reported evidence of this phenomenon in a study of cable TV's effect on local news viewing in several markets.[11] Hill and Dyer found that cable signals imported from large cities reduced local news viewing in smaller locales by as much as 15 percent.[12] Jeffries published similar findings.[13] Walker and Bellamy provided additional clues when, in assessing the impact of remote control devices, they found viewers "zapping" from newscasts to other programs available to them.[14] If viewers are siphoned from local news and/or lost through "zapping," the result would be lower ratings and an impetus for affiliates to cut news expenses. One component of local TV news that industry sources associate with this audience shifting are the affiliates' late evening newscasts, where downward ratings simultaneously occurred with expanded cable penetration.[15]

The other notion is that cutbacks in local news are not determined by "news" profit-and-loss, but by the profitability of the entire affiliate operation. With sign-on to sign-off ratings in decline, affiliates may seek "horizontal" cuts, in which all departments must sacrifice; news departments, whatever their ratings, would not go untouched. Contrary to the evidence of Webster and others, Reagan; Becker, Dunwoody, and Rafaeli; and Baldwin, Barrett, and Bates, found that viewers inclined to venture from affiliates and use cable TV for national news and entertainment programming continued to tune to affiliates for local news.[16] These findings were consistent with actual ratings figures that depicted stable local news viewing, at least for dinner-hour broadcasts, throughout the 1980s, when affiliates' prime-time audiences, and those in other day parts, were eroded.[17] Industry sources affirmed that some news staff reductions had been enacted because affiliates needed a means of reducing expenses in the face of sagging non-news ratings and revenues.[18]

Whether staff reductions diminish the quality of news coverage is also a matter of some debate. It has been observed that in some cases layoffs streamlined newsroom operations. These observations, particularly in light of the evidence that newsrooms grew very rapidly in a short period during the late 1970s, may indicate that newsrooms were already too large, that they had expanded past the point at which additional staff members contributed appreciably to news quality.

On the other hand, several works have concluded that journalistic "quality," at least the way it is measured at the time staffing cuts are ordered, can be at risk when news departments shrink. Carroll found that the number of full-time staff members, a variable in his study of large and small TV newsrooms, had a substantial impact on a station's ability to enterprise and accomplish an "extensive job of news reporting."[19] Berkowitz showed that as much as "news judgment" was an ideal among journalists, "resource constraints" actually determined whether news expectations were met.[20] Harmon concurred, and in a participant-observation study of newsrooms in Cincinnati described how affiliates were "stretching their resources" to get the job done.[21] In a study of several newsrooms that had cut

staff, Rosenau found instances of assignment editors "passing" on stories because of a shortage of reporters and videographers, producers unable to check and verify story content because of a lack of associates and writers, and news directors permitting the use of video news releases to fill newscasts.[22] Indisputable evidence that resource reductions can threaten news quality came from several network affiliates that eliminated their entire news staffs and took their news off the air.

An implication in many recent observations is that the personnel line in a newsroom budget stands as a likely target should an affiliate be required to cut expenses. This is true even though equipment and facilities, not personnel, are often the largest expenditures that confront local TV stations. Equipment and facilities are capital expenses that wind up as assets on a balance sheet. To enhance profit and loss in a given year, managers must tend to operating expenses. "Personnel" is the dominant operating expense. According to the National Association of Broadcasters, 40 percent of operating expenses in local television and almost two-thirds of newsroom expenses are consumed in salaries paid personnel. Another reason news is an attractive budget-cutting target is that newsrooms often employ more people than other affiliate departments; according to the NAB, news alone accounts for more than one-quarter of a station's total salary expense, while payroll expenses in other departments such as sales and engineering, because they have fewer employees, can be much less.[23]

Thus at affiliates news personnel may be vulnerable should owners be dissatisfied with the news bottom line, the bottom line of the entire station, or both. This may explain why management has announced many newsroom layoffs. When this happens, the news personnel are quick to frame another key question: "Will I be the one to go?" There is little in the literature that would help predict which journalists would be singled out in a layoff or staff reduction. This may be a complicated decision that revolves around a news director's personal assessment of an employee's ability. Nevertheless, there have been indications that some predictions can be made if job categories are individually considered.

Staff reductions are seen as attempts to reduce "excess" or non-essential positions, a process that may be guided by determinations of "fixed" and "variable" costs. In a newsroom, these determinations are not difficult to make. Anchors represent a fixed cost because newscasts cannot be delivered unless anchors are employed. Similarly, assignment editors are a fixed cost because newscasts require a minimum of central decision-making with regard to news content and coverage. Producers are likewise a fixed cost; usually, one producer is assigned to each newscast and that person is responsible for a minimum level of preparation to fill what would otherwise be a "hole" in the affiliate's program schedule. In contrast to anchors, assignment editors, and producers, reporters and videographers are variable costs. While they do help fill the "hole," it is typical that a given reporter or videographer will not be responsible for doing this on any given day. The extent to which reporters and videographers are needed is essentially determined by commitments to journalistic quality. In a purely practical sense, the hole could be filled with wire copy and syndicated material without any reporters and videographers. Likewise, a category that includes special feature reporters, executive producers, associate producers, writers, and other more-specialized news employees would be a variable cost because these figures do not directly shoulder the burden of getting a newscast on the air.

Another factor that also may be used to determine who stays and who goes pertains to the extent a job category contributes to attracting and holding audiences necessary in ratings, the ratings in turn determining a level of revenue sufficient to satisfy owners of the facility. Because of the diversity of individual contribution in a newscast, such a "zero budget" approach may be highly subjective and the further product of selective judgments among news directors. Yet there is evidence that more and more news directors have been urged by upper management to conduct such analysis.[24] Further evidence suggests that at least one job category would be protected based on its perceived contribution to the ratings. This job category comprises the anchors, said to have much influence in determining viewership according to scholars who have studied them.[25]

With possible declines in journalistic quality in the foreground, these economic explanations were touched upon in the volume of anecdotal literature on newsroom staff reductions that first sprang in 1986. The first major layoffs in local TV news occurred in the spring of that year at WABC in New York, KABC in Los Angeles, and WLS in Chicago, each station losing between forty and fifty news staff members. By the end of 1986, there were reported layoffs of around twenty-five people at WCBS and WNBC in New York and KNBC in Los Angeles. News work force reductions in these major market stations were estimated at between 17 and 20 percent. In 1987 and 1988, there were similar reports from major market stations not owned by networks, including WCCO in Minneapolis and KRON in San Francisco.[26]

By the early 1990s, reports of layoffs and staff reductions in local news were more widespread. KIRO in Seattle terminated twenty-seven news and news-related employees; KGW in nearby Portland, Oregon, lost fifteen positions. In the Rocky Mountain region, KMGH in Denver reduced its staff from 100 to seventy members; KTSP in Phoenix had similar plans, while KGUN in Tucson cut staff by 10 percent. In the Midwest, KAKE in Wichita eliminated two of every ten news positions. Of note were two reports in 1990 from the Southeast, where WPTF in Raleigh and WKXT in Knoxville "gutted" their news operations; the Raleigh affiliate eventually replaced its early and late news with syndicated programming, while the Knoxville station continued with a skeleton crew of anchors and producers. Meanwhile, there were renewed reports of layoffs in the very largest newsrooms where the outbreak of staff reductions was first reported years before. In what it referred to as "controlled shrinkage," the management of WCBS announced plans to terminate another twenty-five employees; WABC and WNBC followed suit. At KYW in Philadelphia, two dozen positions were cut when separate half-hour blocks of local news were revamped. There were also reports of additional terminations at KABC, KNBC, and WJLA in Washington.[27]

Based on this literature, the study was designed to test the following research propositions:

(1) That during a one-year period, a sizable cross-section of the nation's affiliates will have acted to reduce the size of their news staffs. Because the study considered a period (mid-1991 to mid-1992) immediately succeeding that used in the RTNDA's report, results should replicate the RTNDA's finding that approximately one-third of affiliates were so acting.

(2) That there is a pattern of staff reductions based on market size such that the largest number of affected stations will be in the largest markets and the smallest number in the smallest markets. Results should replicate like findings in the RTNDA report.

(3) That the notion of fixed and variable costs are associated with the proportion of positions lost in respective job categories. Because their positions tend to be fixed costs, anchors, assignment editors, and producers will have been minimally involved in staff reductions. Conversely, reporters, videographers, and "other" employees, whose positions are variable costs, will have been involved in the greatest number of reductions.

(4) That perceptions of "ratings contribution" are associated with the proportion of positions lost in respective job categories. There will be a relationship between positions lost and the extent news directors deem them essential to the bottom line.

Methodology

The research questions were addressed as part of a survey conducted by a university to determine hiring trends in local television news. The instrument was sent to news directors at every non-satellite network affiliate. Initial telephone checks showed that twenty-one of these affiliates did not have news departments prior to mid-1991; these affiliates were dropped. A total of 541 news directors subsequently received the survey; 338 responded, providing a response rate of 63 percent. The data collection took place between June and August 1992.

To replicate the RTNDA's 1992 finding that affiliates, on the order of one-third of the total, were involved in actions to cut staff, the news directors were asked whether in the past year (mid 1991-mid 1992) their news staff had "expanded," "stayed the same," or had been "reduced." News directors who had reduced staff were then instructed to pick from three alternatives that best described how these reductions had been accomplished. These alternatives included: (1) attrition, that is not filling openings, (2) layoffs, and (3) a combination of layoffs and attrition. All news directors were instructed to indicate their ADI ranking in order that the second research question, pertaining to market-size variation, could be addressed.

To test the proposition that some newsroom job categories were harder hit than others, and that differences related to fixed-variable cost factors, news directors were given a list of job categories and instructed to supply specific numerical figures as to the numbers of lost positions. There was no "combination" category such as "reporter-videographer"; to facilitate the analysis the news directors determined which category best applied to each lost position. This enabled reduction-by-category comparisons to be made by total numbers. Because the work force was not evenly distributed by job category, and some categories had far more potential "victims" than others, it was recognized that raw numbers would not fully reflect vulnerable job categories. Accordingly, the raw figures were converted to percentages and then compared to a second set of percentages that depicted the previous representation of different job categories in the national news work force. A 1991 Freedom Forum survey provided this second set of percentages.[28] The difference between "numbers lost" and "previous work force representation," referred to as the "loss index," additionally assessed job category vulnerability.

To pursue the final question, that reductions by job category were related to ratings expectations, news directors were instructed to rate the individual categories in that way. The categories were listed and news directors were asked to "strongly disagree," "disagree," "agree," or

"strongly agree" that each was "essential to the ratings." These responses were correlated with the loss index to test a layoff-to-ratings relationship.

Results

The objective of the study was to collect national data that would replicate the RTNDA's finding that around one-third of affiliate newsrooms faced economic stresses sufficient to call for the elimination of news staff positions. It was also hoped that a numerical accounting of lost positions would give better explanation as to who is singled out. It was proposed that job category is a predictor based on whether a category was a fixed or variable cost and whether the job had a perceived contribution to ratings. The results of the study allowed most of these objectives to be achieved. The study also sought to provide the first actual "census" of staff reductions in local TV news; this goal was achieved to some extent, based on the 63 percent of newsrooms that were heard from.

The first hypothesis, that sizable numbers of affiliates are acting to reduce news staffs, was supported. The RTNDA reported that during 1990-91 exactly 36.2 of all local affiliates had eliminated staff. As Table 1 shows, this study found the figure in 1991-92 to be 31.1 percent. The study accounted for 105 affiliates that had cut staff in that period.

Additional data in Table 1 supported the second hypothesis, that staff reductions are related to market size. The number of affiliates reporting reductions in the top-25 markets was 47 percent, substantially greater than the 31 percent national average; by a three-to-two margin affiliates in these markets were more likely to reduce staff than expand it. In the second and third market sectors (ADI 26-50 and ADI 51-100), the proportions of affiliates reporting reductions were, respectively, 34 and 35 percent, likewise above the national average. Finally in the smallest markets (ADI 101-208), the proportion of affiliates acting to reduce staff, 23 percent, was well below the national average; only in the smallest markets did decisions to expand sizably exceed decisions to reduce. The market-size

analysis in Table 1 was consistent with the market breakdowns provided in the RTNDA report and suggests that market size warrants consideration in further studies of newsroom downsizing. It is possible that the smallest markets had the least "excess" personnel.

The perseverance many affiliates showed in executing these staff reductions was shown in the number that fired employees. This data also appears in Table 1. While most affiliates reduced staff by not filling openings, this did not occur in all cases. More than one-quarter of the staff reductions were accomplished by layoffs alone, a larger proportion than the 17 percent reported by the RTNDA the year before. This study accounted for sixty newsroom layoffs in the 1991-92 period.

Table 2 analyzes the numbers of news workers whose positions were eliminated. The study accounted for the loss of 641 full-time news positions in 1991-92. The median loss among the 105 affected affiliates was 6.10 positions, a loss rate of 20.2 percent based on a median staff size of 30.2 positions as determined by the RTNDA.[29] The loss rate was inflated because seven affiliates laid off large numbers of employees and indicated their news operations had been dramatically reduced. Two news directors used the term "gutted" to describe what had happened. These seven affiliates accounted for 167 of the 641 lost positions. The loss rate excluding these seven affiliates was 4.83 positions, or about 16 percent per newsroom.

The third hypothesis, that losses in specific job categories were related to fixed and variable costs, was tentatively supported. The analysis of news positions lost by job category at all 105 affected affiliates (Table 2) offered evidence that reporters and those placed in an "other" category (feature reporters, executive producers, associate producers, and writers), their salaries being variable costs, were, as expected, targeted. Using the loss index, it can be seen that reporters, who previously comprised 23 percent of the work force, had their ranks trimmed by 26.3 percent. Those in the "other" category were the most hard hit; initially representing only one of ten positions, they were involved in one of five staff reductions. Conversely, producers, assignment editors, and anchors, their salaries

being fixed costs, were protected. Assignment editors were trimmed almost in direct proportion to their work force representation. The proportion of producers and, notably, anchors, increased at the affected stations as a result of the 1991-92 reductions.

Unexpected, however, was the protection apparently given to videographers. It had been anticipated that videographer ranks would have been thinned. Yet the loss index suggested that videographers, like assignment editors, were eliminated proportionally to their representation in the work force.

While the data covering all 105 affected stations tended to affirm fixed and variable costs as a means of isolating vulnerable positions, a market-size breakdown qualifies this finding. Because Table 1 suggested that market size influences downsizing decisions, a market analysis of the job category losses in Table 2 was conducted. The results appear in Table 3. Work force data allowed loss indexes only for the full national sample, not by market size. Yet the raw figures in Table 3 did contain two results that further suggest that downsizing is viewed differently in different sized markets. First, affected affiliates in the top-50 markets may protect reporters but tend to eliminate those in the "other" category; two of five losses in ADI 26-50, for example, involved the "others." Second, affected affiliates in the small markets may not target "others," likely because small newsrooms do not have many of these specialized personnel. The relatively few small market news directors with downsizing orders executed them by eliminating reporters, who were involved in 36 percent of the small station cutbacks.

The fourth hypothesis, that losses by job category were related to perceived ratings contribution, was supported, at least using data from the full sample. As Table 4 shows, the news directors overwhelmingly "agreed" that all job categories were essential to ratings. There was, however, sharp variation based on news directors who "strongly agreed." Thus the percentage of news directors who "strongly agreed" a job category was "ratings essential" was compared to the loss index

reported in Table 2. A positive correlation was expected such that protected categories would be deemed most essential. A strong positive correlation of .88 was found between ratings expectations and the loss index.

Discussion

Survey studies of news staffing are limited by response rate and the time frame they consider. They are also simple in design and tend to focus on the "what" rather than the "why." Yet as limited as they are, such studies, when conducted on a national basis, can provide information necessary in further investigating what appear to be important questions relating to the management and economics of local television news.

The 641 lost positions do not in themselves point to a major disruption in the local TV news work force. These positions represented only three percent of the work force. It must also be noted that the data gathering partially coincided with the 1991 recession, when economic stress may have been abnormally acute. It should be recalled, however, that the RTNDA alluded to similar tolls in a survey period immediately preceding that of this study. Preceding the RTNDA study was anecdotal evidence of layoffs and staff reductions that dated to 1986. The compilation of this evidence would suggest that from around 1986 through at least 1992 some managers expressed a willingness to eliminate news staff. Future surveys can help determine whether this development represents a cyclical or structural response. In addition, such surveys may help address what remains an unanswered question: are managers merely trimming the "flab" from their news operations or are they cutting into news gathering "muscle?" A future study that failed to locate widespread staff reductions might support the former. On the other hand, future studies depicting a constancy of staff reductions might suggest the muscle is threatened.

At least for the moment, there does seem to be a momentum behind these cutbacks. This was indicated in figures here that when compared to those of the RTNDA show an increase in the number of layoffs. In addition, seven affiliates severely reduced their news operations. Not reflected in the results were layoffs at three additional affiliates found to have eliminated news; losses at these affiliates could not be reported because respondents returned either blank questionnaires or letters indicating "no news."

One possibility supported by these results is that local TV stations, because of the "channel revolution" and increased competition for viewers, may be "cleaving." Among the TV stations that have provided local news in the past, which includes virtually all affiliates, this cleavage may separate enterprises that are, respectively, committed and not committed to news in the future. Attempts to understand such a "cleavage" phenomenon depend on segregating stations that show signs of gravitating into an economically "affected" group, as was attempted in this study. A case for cleavage can be made from the evidence that almost equal numbers of affiliates have been moving to expand and reduce their news operations. This study found such two-way movement in 1991-92. The RTNDA's report, although stressing net growth, saw a similar development in 1990-91. The anecdotal sources, moveover, have continued to report expansions in local news as well as reductions.

That there may be two distinct groups of affiliates, one embracing news and the other diverting from it, is also consistent with what it known of TV's newer competitive environment. To an affiliate, local news has two notable economic features: it is (1) enormously expensive but (2) a means of segmenting an audience. Well-capitalized affiliates may favor local news in order to take advantage of its uniqueness in the marketplace. But because not all news operations are "No. 1" and promise a return on the huge investments constantly required, there may also be a group of affiliates that would hesitate to factor news into future planning.

There was further indication from this study that affiliates in this "affected" group fall into three subgroups. The largest subgroup comprises those affiliates inclined to preserve a news presence but by riding herd on expenses and trimming staff on a gradual basis; WCBS, with its "controlled shrinkage," appears an example of such an affiliate. More dramatic action seems the order in the second subgroup, made up of affiliates inclined to continue token news operations and hold audiences as best they can, perhaps by cutting variable costs just short of the point at which large numbers of viewers would notice and defect; affiliates that gutted their newsrooms may exemplify those in this subgroup. Finally, a third subgroup of affected affiliates would "cancel" their news; by firing all news employees, these stations would relieve themselves of a sizable payroll burden and conceivably gain a brief windfall by selling news-related assets. All affected stations would cut news staff at their peril by measuring a local news "benefit," its uniqueness in the marketplace, foregone.

One of the limitations of this study was that it could not better define these subgroups, in part because it was not set up to determine whether affected stations in 1991-92 were the same as those affected in the past. Much could be learned if researchers could resolve this shortcoming in future studies by using "staffing history" as a variable. Additional variables could include "staff size" (is an affected affiliate's newsroom already "small" by market standards?), "ratings history" (is it entrenched in second or third place?), and "dial position" (is it a "UHF" station with "VHF" competition?).

Despite some lack of definition in the study, there were signs that groups of affected stations do exist. The best indication were the affiliates that fell into the second and third subgroups, those that took the drastic steps of gutting or eliminating their news operations. Because of confidentiality provisions, six of the seven affiliates that reported severe layoffs in 1991-92 could not be identified; it was determined, though, that these included two top-50 affiliates (both in the Northeast), one top-100 affiliate (upper Midwest), and three small market outlets (all in the Southeast). The seventh impacted affiliate was WRBT in Baton Rouge, which eliminated its half-hour newscasts and fired all but a

skeleton crew reassigned to five-minute "news briefs." The three affiliates that eliminated news during the survey period and whose totals could not be reported were WSYM/Lansing, KECY/Yuma-El Centro, and KARD/Monroe. In addition, the preliminary telephone checks revealed that two affiliates had fired all of their news staff members in early 1991 just prior to the survey period; these were WVGA/Valdosta and KBMY/Bismarck. These latter two affiliates joined nineteen others that had eliminated news at some point prior to mid-1991, including WPTA in Raleigh, the 45th market. Using data from 1989 and 1990, McKean and Stone determined that 1.2 percent of the nation's 583 affiliates did not offer news.[30] This study's data from just three years later shows the figure to be at least 3.8 percent.

That several additional affiliates have considered reducing their news commitments, or in some cases maintaining a news presence with fewer employees, was revealed, if only informally, in the open-ended comments of the respondents. Five respondents who had eliminated positions anticipated further shrinkage at their stations in the foreseeable future. Two of these respondents explained that their stations had enacted indefinite hiring freezes despite plans by their competitors to expand news operations and add newscasts. Curiously, the adding of newscasts was not confined to stations that were adding people. One respondent complained about the debut of new news broadcasts at virtually the same moment upper management had ordered staff reductions. Similarly, two affiliates volunteered that they had been simultaneously ordered to supply newscasts to local cable systems and shrink staff. One noteworthy open-ended comment came from a top-25 affiliate, where long-range plans may include a sell-off of ENG equipment and a downsizing of the news department to between twenty and twenty-five people by the year 2000.

While this study was limited to affiliates of ABC, CBS, and NBC, affiliates of the Fox network may in the near future give scholars an additional opportunity to explore the economics of local TV news. The majority of Fox affiliates in 1991 were in the "noncommitted" category.[31] In

1992, however, Fox began mandating news operations at its affiliates and requiring affiliates to provide a timetable for these news ventures as a condition of their contracts with the network. Thus several new local newsrooms may be formed in the years ahead. Whether these Fox newsrooms employ staffs comparable to those of the other affiliates or become token news services that satisfy contract provisions is a question that may bear on all stations that engage in local news.[32]

The study's attempt to account for numbers of positions lost and losses by job category was fruitful and yet some additional steps should be considered in future projects of this type. The heavy losses among reporters and videographers give credence to those who have speculated that news directors are increasingly willing to merge these two positions as a result of downsizing. An attempt to preserve equal levels of each function, through the so-called "one-person band," has been noted in much anecdotal literature. Thus another limitation of the study was in compelling news directors to account for reductions in single job categories; at least one "combination" category, "reporter-videographer," should have been included. Another combination category worthy of consideration is the "anchor-reporter." That reporters emerged as a target in staffing reductions while anchors were immune offers that these two functions, because they are the only ones to involve on-camera work, are likewise being merged. Indeed, in the open-ended commentary, several news directors emphasized that as ranks dwindle, anchors, besides presenting the news, must also carry more of the burden of writing and reporting.

The employee data also bode for new journalistic attitude and background studies, such as those Weaver and Wilhoit published in 1986 and updated in 1991.[33] The Weaver-Wilhoit study may already be limited as it applies to broadcast journalism; besides conceiving firm job category distinctions, it focused on all but the anchor. There is another reason new attitude studies may be needed: tentative indication in this study that the field is becoming "bottom heavy." The RTNDA pointed to a net gain such that losses in some stations were "offset" by gains at others. Yet this study

found that gains and losses were cross-related, and with a significant statistical difference, by market size (Table 1); the losses were distributed from large market to small, the gains vice versa. Thus it is possible that the true "offsetting" effect have been the gains of newcomers in the small markets against the losses of veterans in larger ones. If an attitude study had been conducted in 1991-92, it may have shown that TV journalists had fewer years of experience than levels reported in the past. More importantly, such research may also have documented greater disorientation about TV news as a career track, particularly among the many newcomers in smaller markets; already enduring a low-paying introduction to TV news, they faced the added complication that their upward mobility that year was blocked at 34 percent of stations in the 51-100 market sector, 35 percent of stations in the 26-50 sector, and almost half of stations in the top-25 sector.

What may be the study's most important single finding was that the greatest numbers of affiliates neither expanded nor reduced their newsrooms, but kept them the same. This may mean that many newsrooms have reached a staffing balance, in which excess staff has been removed, leaving news gathering well-being intact. It may also mean that in 1992 these affiliates had a "wait and see" attitude and were delaying decisions until economic factors in local television had been better clarified. Because this "undecided" column may shift, scholars should at least anticipate cuts and expansions, as well as "status quo." As for affiliates and the news services they provide the public, it was safe to conclude at the time of this study that a psychology of reduction existed alongside a logic of expansion. Over the years, local stations have not shied from promoting the advancements they claim to have taken in disseminating news to the public. Now, outside the public's view, layoffs and staff reductions may represent a new "cutting edge" and a matter potentially important to scholars who study this field.

Table 1
Affiliates News Staffing Activity, 1991-92

	All Stations	ADI 1 - 25	ADI 26 - 50	ADI 51-100	ADI 101-208
Expanded	112 (33.1%)	13 (30.0%)	16 (36.3%)	31 (31.3%)	52 (34.4%)
Stayed same	121 (35.7%)	10 (22.2%)	13 (29.5%)	33 (33.3%)	65 (43.0%)
Reduced	105 (31.1%)	21 (46.7%)	15 (34.1%)	35 (35.4%)	34 (22.5%)
Attrition	45	7	7	12	19
Layoffs	28	5	6	9	8
Both	32	9	2	14	7
Total reporting	**338**	**45**	**44**	**99**	**151**

$X^2 = 12.75$, df = 6, $p < .05$

Table 2
Analysis of News Positions Lost by Job Category At 105 Affected Affiliates, 1991-92

	A	B	C	D	
	Total Lost	Lost per Affected Affiliate	Numbers Lost by Percent	Work force Representation, Percent	Loss Index, C vs. D
Reporters	168	1.60	26.3	23.0	-3.3%
Videographers	142	1.35	22.2	22.0	-0.2%
Other	134	1.28	20.9	9.0	-11.9%
Producers	81	0.77	12.6	14.0	+1.4%
Anchors	75	0.71	11.7	26.0	+14.3%
Assignment Eds.	41	0.39	6.3	6.0	-0.3%
Totals	**641**	**6.10**	**100.0%**	**100.0%**	

Table 3
Analysis of News Positions Lost by Job Category Based on Market Size, 1991-92

	ADI 1 - 25		ADI 26 - 50		ADI 51 - 100		ADI 101-208	
	Total Lost	Nos. Lost Pct.	Total Lost	Nos. Lost Pct.	Total Lost	Nos. Lost Pct.	Total Lost	Nos. Lost Pct.
Reporters	28	16.2	25	19.8	64	32.1	51	35.6
Videographers	35	20.2	23	18.2	48	24.1	36	25.2
Other	45	26.0	47	37.3	36	18.1	6	14.0
Producers	30	17.3	11	8.7	20	10.0	20	13.9
Anchors	18	10.4	10	7.9	23	11.5	24	16.7
Assignment Eds.	17	9.8	10	7.9	8	14.0	6	4.0
Totals	**173**	**100%**	**126**	**100%**	**199**	**100%**	**143**	**100%**

Table 4
Job Category As "Essential to Ratings," Compared to Loss Index

	Percent Agree	Percent Strongly Agree	Loss Index
Anchors essential	95.8	71.9	14.3
Producers essential	91.9	60.7	1.4
Assignment Eds. essential	90.1	57.5	-0.3
Videographers essential	77.7	34.5	-0.2
Reporters essential	80.6	36.6	-3.2
Others essential	61.5	21.4	-11.9

$r = .88$, $p < .05$

Notes

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The Daily Race to See Who's Best: Competition, Control, and Newswork

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RUNNING HEAD: Competition

The Daily Race to See Who's Best:

Competition, Control, and Newswork

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AEJMC -- 1993

Abstract

This paper uses a case study of two local television newsrooms in discussing how a competitive newsroom culture flourishes within an oligopolistic industry. Competition is defined not in terms of economic variables but rather as a culturally-situated social practice in which individual or organizational performance is consistently defined against that of a clearly defined group of others. A competitive newsroom culture expresses itself in norms and rituals performed in everyday newswork and helps newsworkers exert control over their jobs. Yet these same norms and rituals ultimately serve corporate interests and help perpetuate oligopolistic control of the news media. Hence, policymakers' attempts to encourage better and more diverse journalism through increased economic competition in the marketplace might not be successful by themselves--they should be accompanied by journalism educators' attempts to foster different forms of news and different newsroom practices and values that do not center around cutthroat competition.

The Daily Race to See Who's Best: Competition, Control, and Newswork

Introduction

Competition is central to many of the ideals which the American news media hold dear. In particular, it is at the heart of the libertarian ideal of the free and open marketplace of competing goods and ideas, in which truth and falsehood can be left to grapple and make themselves finally apparent in the eyes of the citizenry (Siebert, 1956). Competitiveness also traditionally has been considered an important professional value in journalism--those who produce and sell the news are seen as placing a premium on being "number one," whether it is finishing first in circulation or ratings or finishing first on a news story (thereby "scooping" the opposition).

Much of the debate over communication policymaking also has centered around competition, particularly its impact on media output and what, if anything, should be done to increase competition in the marketplace. For example, scholars who have specifically examined television news have asked whether competition (as measured by factors like station ownership, the number of competing newscasts in a market, and relative audience shares) does what it is presumably supposed to do--promote diversity of content, increased spending on news coverage, etc. (see Busterna, 1980, 1988; Atwater, 1984; Lacy, Atwater, Qin, & Powers, 1988; Lacy, Atwater, & Qin, 1989; Lacy & Bernstein, 1992). Based on these studies, Lacy and Bernstein (1992, p. 46)

argue that "increasing competition should be a goal of any regulatory system." But they also note that such a move might not be enough to improve local news coverage if newsrooms respond to a more competitive marketplace by emphasizing sensationalism and form over substance.

This cautionary note in turn implies the limitations of defining mass media competition strictly in economic terms and making policy recommendations solely on marketplace considerations. To begin with, media economists themselves disagree over how best to define "competition" (see Lacy, 1993; Busterna, Hansen, & Ward, 1993; Bogart, 1993), with some even suggesting that the "marketplace" metaphor and its ideal of free and open competition have outlived their usefulness in communications policymaking (Entman & Wildman, 1991). Beyond that, however, studies of a qualitative/critical bent have done much within the past couple of decades to puncture the sometimes inflated rhetoric concerning competition and the news media. For example, many have noted the dramatic contrast between the ideal of vigorous economic competition and the increasing concentration of corporate control and ownership of the media (e.g., Murdock & Golding, 1977; Bagdikian, 1990). Others have pointed out that regulatory efforts to promote competition within the American broadcast industry actually have tended to serve the interests of the oligopoly controlling broadcasting (e.g., Streeter, 1983). And as for the premium placed on "exclusives" or "scoops,"

researchers have noted that such stories seem to serve the selfish interests of newsworkers and news organizations much more than they do the public interest (e.g, Gans, 1979, pp. 176-181; Schudson, 1986, pp. 79-82).

This paper aims to extend this qualitative/critical tradition and at the same time present a different perspective on communication policy. It views competition not strictly in economic terms but rather in terms of a particular value system, a set of norms and rituals which are largely taken-for-granted and unquestioned and which are not solely determined by economic structure. By examining this value system as it is enacted by individual newsworkers in individual news organizations, we can gain additional insight into the relationship between economic structure, newsroom practices, and news content, and in turn gain additional insight into the question of whether regulatory efforts to increase marketplace competition by themselves can be expected to improve the quality and diversity of news.

The paper will focus specifically on television news organizations, within which competitive norms appear to exert especially strong influence, both at the network level (for example, see Moore, 1988) and at the local level. This is clear from a passage in an issue of the Communicator, the publication of the Radio-Television News Directors Association (RTNDA): "News is competition. . . . [E]very day we run the race that determines who's the best. It takes skill and experience to win. RTNDA is

here to help" (Radio-Television News Directors Association, 1988, p. 11). This passage, designed to attract local television news managers to the RTNDA annual convention, appears to be appealing to a shared, taken-for-granted understanding among them that their business is, in fact, competitive and that RTNDA can add to their skill and experience in helping them win their "daily race to see who's best." And yet this race is run within the constraints imposed by an industry devoted to economic efficiency and profit maximization, goals which can openly conflict with newsworkers' goals to "win" and be "the best" (see Bantz, 1985; Matrullo, 1989; Auletta, 1992).

It is this tension between competitive norms and practices and an oligopolistic industry that actually limits economic competition that is of special interest here, for it raises questions about the negctiation of control within news organizations. For Gallagher (1982, p. 152), the question of control concerns "the extent to which communicators are able to shape [media] output" and "preserve creative autonomy" within media organizations, taking into account factors ranging from external political and economic pressures to management structures and professional ideologies. For Ettema and Whitney (1982), the question is much the same--how individuals in media organizations maintain creative control over their work within various organizational and institutional constraints.

We can raise similar questions about competition, control, and

newswork. That is, we may ask: How do the competitive values and practices of newsworkers help these newsworkers control and make sense of their work? How do economic constraints help shape those values and practices? That is, what is the relationship between individual and organizational competition and the oligopolistic structure of the media industry? To what extent does a competitive newsroom culture appear to help or hinder continued corporate, oligopolistic control of the mass media? And what implications do the answers to these questions hold for communication policymaking?

Method: Defining and Identifying Competition

In trying to answer these questions, I undertook a case study of two local television newsrooms, drawing upon the methods and perspectives offered by previous newswork studies, including those of Epstein (1974), Altheide (1976), Tuchman (1978), Schlesinger (1987), and Fishman (1980). While there are differences among these studies, what they and other qualitative studies of newswork generally share is a reliance on traditional sociological methods of interviews and participant observation within individual news organizations, an assumption that reality is to a large extent socially constructed (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) and that the norms and routines of "making news" play a significant role in constructing reality, and a belief that news often serves an ill-defined "public interest" less than it does the interests of news organizations and those of legitimated

institutions in society. In this way, newswork studies link individual and organizational routines and practices within the news media to existing power relationships in the broader political economy.

In undertaking this study, I attempted to define competition not primarily in terms of economic variables but again as a culturally-situated social practice. Sherif (1976), in an essay on the sociology of sport, provides a definition that can be extended to the study of competition in the mass media:

> Competition consists of activities directed more or less consistently toward meeting a standard or achieving a goal in which performance by a person or by his [or her] group is compared and evaluated relative to that of selected other persons or groups. (p. 19)

Through such a definition (awkward as it may seem), we see competition not as a "given," something that is biologically wired into human beings or mandated by the laws of nature (see Kohn, 1986; Augros & Stanciu, 1991; Eisler & Combs, 1991). Instead, we see competition as a learned and taken-for-granted set of norms and practices in which we are continually expected to work individually or in groups to achieve certain goals, always comparing ourselves against the performance of others and, implicitly, trying to <u>better</u> the performance of others. Hence, in conducting this study, I tried to identify different norms and routines within news organizations in which personal or organizational performance was consistently evaluated against the performance of a selected group of clearly defined opponents. In

turn, I tried to discover how those competitive norms and routines helped newsworkers control and understand their work, and also how such norms and routines were shaped by organizational and institutional constraints.

In keeping with the methods of previous studies cited above, I relied primarily on direct observation of newswork and interviews with newsworkers. The bulk of my fieldwork took place in a television newsroom in a medium-sized market. Over a six-month period, I watched newsworkers producing newscasts and editing stories, and accompanied reporters and videographers on news assignments. In addition, I conducted taped interviews with the news director and other newsroom supervisors as well as with several reporters and producers. For purposes of comparison, I also visited a newsroom in a top-20 market, conducting similar observations and interviews. And I studied tapes of stories and newscasts from both newsrooms. Throughout the study, I drew upon my own several years of professional experience in broadcast news to help me interpret what I saw and heard.

The station in the top-20 market was first in the ratings at the time of the study, but it was facing a stiff challenge from the number two station; hence, it appeared to be a good site to observe competition. However, the same did not appear at first to be true of the primary organization in the study, the medium-sized market station. The station historically had dominated its market, and in so doing had served as a textbook example of how

media owners can thwart competition and amass capital by manipulating regulation and consolidating their holdings. The station went on the air in 1953, with the majority owner being a local attorney who had been a major figure in local Republican politics. Under his leadership, the station established itself as the only commercial VHF station in the area, defeating FCC efforts in the late 1950s and early 1960s to take away its VHF channel and put it on a more equal footing with the other stations in the market, which were all UHF. The owner then used his profits to acquire other television stations across the country; eventually, he would be listed as one of the 400 richest persons in America, with a fortune estimated at $200 million. And his original station continued to dominate the ratings in its market, finishing first in 40 consecutive ratings periods prior to the time of the study, often by whopping margins.

This made me somewhat wary of choosing the station as a research site. The station's newsworkers seemed to have little reason to pay much attention to what the competition was doing, which of course would make it a rather unpromising place to study competitive norms and practices. As it turned out, my fears were unfounded. For even with the station's dominant market position--a position it had achieved by manipulating the political and economic environment to severely hinder, if not cripple, its competition--the station's newsworkers quickly showed themselves to be acutely aware of and concerned about the other stations in

the market.

"Scooping Butt" and "Getting Smoked": Competition for News

My observation periods in the station's newsroom typically began in the late afternoon when preparations for the early evening newscast were in full swing, and lasted through the late evening newscast several hours later. At night, the person in charge of the newsroom was the 10 p.m. newscast producer. He was in his mid-20s, a graduate of a local university's broadcast journalism program who had begun at the station as an intern a few years before. In general, the producer was free to assign stories, edit copy, and arrange the newscast however he saw fit.

It soon became clear that the producer and others in the newsroom consistently measured their work against that of the three other television news operations in the market. The most obvious manifestation of this was the presence of a bank of four television monitors in the newsroom, each tuned to a different station. Once, giving an impromptu tour of the newsroom to a group of visitors, a reporter pointed to the monitors and said: "We monitor the opposition. We don't want them to have anything we don't." And indeed, during newscasts or during "newsbreaks" when upcoming newscasts were being promoted, the producer or another newsroom staffer would routinely position him- or herself in front of the monitors, quickly turning up the volume of each in turn to make sure the station was not getting "scooped," and more often than not making derogatory remarks about the other

stations' anchor teams and what stories they were airing ("Stale," the producer would mutter, or: "You can't air <u>that</u>, partner!").

The producer also routinely monitored what rival stations' news crews were doing by quizzing his reporters. For example, when a reporter returned from the scene of a small plane crash, the producer immediately asked her whether a competing station had been at the scene first, and then responded with an oath when he heard the answer. (The reporter, meanwhile, called the rival station's reporter a "bitch" for shoving her as the two scrambled to get the story.) Other newsworkers proved that they, too, were concerned about the opposition, especially when they had some sort of exclusive story, no matter what the subject. One reporter was determined to air a story about a three-legged dog before "the whole world" found out about it (she was even unhappy that I, as an outsider, knew of the story). And one night when the station was airing the network telecast of a baseball playoff game that threatened to go into extra innings, the sportscaster said he hoped the game would go just long enough "so my competition can't show highlights" (that is, so that the other stations' sportscasts would end before the game did).

The thrill-of-victory, agony-of-defeat competitive culture of the newsroom can perhaps best be illustrated by two incidents which took place on consecutive nights. In the first, a reporter and videographer responded to a call on the newsroom police

scanner about a collision between a car and a municipal bus. The pair returned a short time later, loudly and exultantly. They had great video, they said--it had been a bad accident. (The video showed a woman pinned in her car by a sign pole which had smashed through the windshield.) Best of all, no other station was at the scene. "They weren't even there!" shouted the videographer. "We scooped their butt!" For the next several minutes, the reporter and videographer sat in the newsroom happily teasing each other over their respective roles in getting the exclusive story with the great video, the reporter saying words to the effect that covering accidents was more interesting than covering many of the dull government meetings that usually took place at night. The evening news producer, meanwhile, took the opportunity to boast during a phone call to his news director about both the accident story ("Boy, it's a dandy!") and another story concerning a local school official accepting a new job ("No one else has it").

The second incident, however, was not as happy an occasion for the newsroom. The producer had received a phone tip about storm damage to a school in a small town several miles from the station. He dispatched a crew to the scene in a live truck, only to learn that the truck did not have the proper equipment to transmit video directly back to the station. At the same time, his crew informed him that a rival station had arrived at the scene with its own live truck. So, in response, the producer sent a second truck to the scene. "God, I want to pull this one off,"

muttered the producer. "I do not want [the other station] to get off a live shot when I don't have one. That would piss me off like you wouldn't believe. The competition has begun." As it turned out, the producer's second live truck also could not transmit a live signal directly from the scene, while the rival station's truck could. The producer was livid: "We got fucking smoked on that story."

What these observations suggest is that competition--the consistent measuring of one's performance against a clearly defined set of others--is built into the norms and routines of everyday newswork. That is, competition, like other newsroom practices, is ritualized and enacted (Ehrlich, 1992). Routines such as "monitoring the opposition" serve as "strategic rituals" similar to the journalistic practice of objectivity (Tuchman, 1972). They help newsworkers manage anxiety and uncertainty about their jobs and help them shield themselves from criticism--by monitoring the opposition, newsworkers reassure themselves that they are not getting beaten on stories and that they will not come under criticism for getting beaten. Competition is enacted in the sense suggested by Morgan (1986, p. 137), when he notes that organizational "environments are enacted by hosts of individuals and organizations each acting on the basis of their interpretations of a world that is in effect mutually defined." That is, the competitive culture of television news is mutually constructed by individuals and organizations acting in concert.

For example, in the live trucks incident, the arrival of one station's truck was interpreted as a competitive challenge by the other station and was met accordingly. In such ways, competitive norms and routines sustain themselves and a competitive organizational environment is continually constructed and reconstructed.

Through ritualized and enacted competition, newsworkers exert a fair amount of control over their work and media output. The 10 p.m. newscast producer occasionally might call the news director at home to ask a specific question about news coverage, but to repeat, he generally had the authority to direct the newsroom as he saw fit during the evening hours. For a young man only a few years out of journalism school, this was a source of satisfaction that surpassed that of being an anchor:

> There's some power involved, so I guess there's some ego involved. It's a different type of ego. You know, the [on-]air people, they have their ego, being the center of attention, and my ego, I guess, is telling them, you know: You're gonna do it <u>this</u> way.

And the producer expressed this authority by ordering, for example, a second live truck to the scene of the storm-damaged school. Nothing the producer said at the time or later seemed to indicate that he sent the second truck simply to conform to management policy. Nor did there seem to be any sort of economic incentive compelling him to do it, no obvious payoff in terms of higher ratings or more advertising revenue (in fact, the producer admitted later, his decision probably had cost the station money,

because it had to pay overtime to the driver of the second truck). Instead, the producer's stated reason for sending the extra truck was very simple:

> PRODUCER: Well--I don't like having [the other station] being able to get a live shot out of [the storm scene] if I can't. (Laughs) It's just sheer competition. I just don't like it.
>
> AUTHOR: What's the [big] deal there?
>
> PRODUCER: Well--they're my competition. And if they can go live from the parking lot [of the school], they've got me--beat. That's the bottom line.

The producer thus saw his job in terms of trying to beat the "competition," or at least trying not to be beaten by them. He clearly understood the competition to be the three other television news operations in the area (not cable, independent stations, the telephone companies, or others competing for the viewers of network affiliates within the broader political and economic environment). The fact that ratings data indicated that the station had little to fear from the other three stations was of little concern to the producer. He simply took it for granted that he was supposed to compete and try to win--that was "the bottom line," a fact of life so obvious that it was barely worth mentioning. And if he occasionally did get "smoked" on a story, that was part of the game; the nights when he and his staff "scooped the butts" of the other stations and celebrated their victories more than made up for such defeats.

In short, newsworkers use competitive norms and rituals to make sense of their jobs and give them a clear set of goals. In

this way, too, a competitive culture helps them exert control over their work. By defining part of their task as trying to beat two or three opponents in the "daily race to see who's best," newsworkers use competition as a form of "quality control" (Gans, 1979, pp. 180-181). That is, given the lack of consistent and reliable audience feedback, newsworkers use the ritual of monitoring the opposition to evaluate their performance and reassure themselves that they are doing as good if not a better job than their opponents (hence the producer's routine putdowns of the other stations' newscasts). And in a broader sense, the continued ritualization and enactment of a competitive newsroom culture also acts as a form of control in that, as Carey (1989, p. 18-19) suggests, it facilitates "the construction and maintenance of an ordered, meaningful cultural world that can serve as a control [emphasis added] and container for human action." Newsworkers draw upon competitive norms in giving continued order and meaning to their shared existence.

But the scope of newsworkers' control is decidedly limited, for closer examination of the professional norms and practices of the competition for news indicates that they dovetail with other professional norms and practices in ultimately serving corporate interests and hence in subtle ways helping to perpetuate corporate control of the media. First, the competition for news is closely tied to time; newsworkers judge whether they have beaten their competition according to whether they have a story

before their opponents do. But as a number of researchers (e.g., Schlesinger, 1977, 1987, chap, 4; Schudson, 1986, pp. 79-82) have pointed out, this "competition by the clock" is ironic, since it takes place within a highly routinized production system that is designed to ensure a steady, reliable flow of news. In the words of Schudson (1986):

> The American focus on the scoop serves, in part, to cover up the bureaucratic and prosaic reality of most news gathering. . . . The insistence on getting the latest news and getting it first, the headlong lunge, the competitive rush that comes with a breaking story, all this is an effort to deny and to escape the humdrum of daily journalism. (pp. 81, 82)

Thus, the pleasure and excitement newsworkers derive from "scooping the butts" of their opposition compensates for the fact that, to put it bluntly, newswork is often boring and monotonous, designed to turn out a daily product for commercial consumption and corporate profit. As Tuchman (1978) and others have argued, news organizations structure their work around deadlines to help them process and sift through the glut of potential news stories; in addition, newsgathering routines focus on legitimated institutions which can be counted on as regular sources of news. In this way, news organizations maintain their corporate and institutional identity as reliable sources of up-to-the-minute information, which in turn is seen as an economically efficient way of generating audiences (Owen & Wildman, 1992, p. 176). At the same time, they confer continued legitimacy upon powerful institutions and reproduce the status quo.

By serving as a diversion from "the bureaucratic and prosaic reality" of newswork, the competition for news helps keep newsworkers from questioning usual newsgathering routines, routines which help serve corporate interests. It compensates for newsworkers being to a large extent cogs in an industrial process dedicated to "manufacturing" news (Fishman, 1980; Bantz, McCorkle, & Baade, 1980). As the 10 p.m. news producer described it:

> Monday night, we had just been sitting around complaining about how we hadn't had anything going on lately. It's been dull; we haven't had any breaking stories, you know, struggling to find leads and such, and uh--so we kind of look for a night [when breaking news happens]. It's a lot of fun. It's a lot more fun to see how you well you can pull something off. . . . I just really dig that, when, you know, you have to think on your feet, and being able to pull it off, is like--(claps hands together)--yes! We did it!

The "competitive rush" newsworkers get may serve corporate interests in other ways as well. Entry-level workers in television news typically can expect low salaries and long hours. One textbook aimed at beginning broadcast journalism students tells them bluntly: "Don't expect to make a lot of money at first, and don't assume that a high income will follow later. And don't go into broadcast news for the wrong reasons. Go into broadcast news because <u>you love it</u>" (Hausman, 1992, p. 273). If the words of the producer quoted above are any indication, those newsworkers who "love" the business do so in part because of the fun and excitement of competing against the clock and their opposition and, in the case of the producer, the chance to exert

some degree of control over their work and the work of others. In return, news organizations are able get long hours out of many of their workers and pay them relatively little.

Competitive norms and practices also serve corporate interests in the way they shape the news itself. The competition for news is aimed as much at not getting beaten as it is at beating the opposition; we recall the words of the one reporter explaining the significance of the ritual of monitoring the opposition: "We don't want them to have anything we don't." We recall also the words of the producer about not liking the fact that his competition was able to transmit a live picture from the scene of the storm damage when he could not. This concern about matching the stories of one's competition in turn contributes to the strong similarity in news coverage among competitors (Gans, 1979, p. 177; see also Tunstall, 1971, p. 209; Powers, 1977; Adler, 1988, p. 17; Comstock, 1989, pp. 31-38; Bagdikian, 1990, pp. 239-251). Such similarity appears to serve corporate interests in that, as Owen and Wildman (1992, pp. 99-100) note, it adheres to a tried-and-true economic strategy of a small number of competitors appealing to the same audience with highly similar products (although whether such homogeneity will continue to serve corporate interests as more program choices become available to viewers is open to question--see Blumler, 1991).

The competition for news also clearly contributes to trivial, superficial news coverage. It helps perpetuate an emphasis on

"quick and dirty" news stories like the bus accident story, stories which (as the reporter on that story noted) may be more interesting to cover than dull government meetings and which may produce clear "winners" and "losers" in terms of news coverage, but which in the long run are of little importance to the audience. Yet they feature the kind of action and good visuals that the television format for both news and entertainment favors (Epstein, 1974; Altheide, 1976). Such stories also can be produced very quickly, freeing reporters to cover other stories; in this way, news organizations can extract more output from individual newsworkers (see Dracos, 1989). And the emphasis on the "quick and dirty" (expressed more elegantly and euphemistically as a "demand for immediacy") discourages efforts at more thoughtful, in-depth reporting which at least potentially could be more critical of the status quo. In these ways, too, news competition serves corporate interests.

In short, the competition for news serves as a professional ideology in that it is a "means not to know." According to sociologist Dorothy E. Smith, a "means not to know" is "a practice which has the effect of making the fundamental features of our own society mysterious because it prevents us from recognizing them as problematic. . . . What ought to be explained is treated as fact or as assumption" (quoted in Tuchman, 1978, p. 179). Tuchman (1978, p. 196) argues that the practices of newswork serve as means not to know in that "at one and the same

time, they present social actors with materials for producing social structures and they truncate actors' abilities to transform institutions and structures."

Newsworkers draw upon competitive norms in helping them exert control over their work; through their competitive rituals, they enact and reenact a competitive organizational environment and sccial structure. This is a creative accomplishment, one that does not appear to be determined solely by economic constraints--newsworkers in a market with relatively weak ratings competition still may engage in an aggressive competition for news. Yet precisely because this competition is so taken for granted, it serves as a means not to know--newsworkers do not "know" that competitive norms and rituals serve corporate interests and help prevent serious challenges to corporate control of the media. The problematic relationship between a sometimes ferocious social competition for news stories and an oligopolistic corporate structure that discourages free and open economic competition is rarely questioned or explained.

"Series Sleaze" and "Series Stress": Competition for Ratings

While television news organizations compete aggressively for news, television organizations and networks also compete to be first in the ratings (e.g., Gitlin, 1983). The ratings system is central in upholding "the values of stability and maintenance" so important to the broadcast industry (Streeter, 1989, p. 9). Meehan (1984, 1990) argues that ratings constitute the commodity

that is produced, bought, and sold in the American television industry, and that ratings in fact render the tastes and interests of most viewers irrelevant:

> Ratings do not count the viewers, but only the commodity audience which is salable to national advertisers and networks. . . . In short, the massest of mass media, television, is programmed for a narrow slice of the total viewership--for the commodity audience. Thus it is macroeconomic structure--not taste, not training, not temperament--that determines who counts in television. (1990, pp. 118, 132)

If the vast majority of viewers does not count, by implication, the vast majority of those who create television programming does not really count, either. They all are secondary to the battle among ratings firms, advertisers, networks, and station owners for ratings points. This battle is epitomized by the constant bickering in the television industry over the best method of measuring the commodity audience (see Dennis & Williams, 1988; Clark, 1990, 1991; Rothenberg, 1990).

That said, the competition for ratings within television organizations still seems to hold a great deal of meaning for those who work within those organizations. Such was the case in both of the newsrooms I observed, although different newsworkers in the two newsrooms interpreted competitive pressures surrounding ratings quite differently.

Within the top-20 market newsroom, ratings periods (the so-called "sweeps") produced conflicts between rank-and-file reporters and their supervisors. The conflicts erupted over the "special reports" or news series the newsroom produced

specifically for sweeps to try to boost ratings and revenues. The tendency of newsrooms to resort to especially sensational or fluffy series during sweeps is well documented (e.g., Moritz, 1989), and the top-20 station was no exception, producing series for one ratings period on topics ranging from criminal clergy to X-rated videos. The sleazy nature of these series was a favorite topic of derision for the local newspaper's television critic (who took to calling the station "Sleaze Channel 8" instead of "News Channel 8"), and in fact was something of an in-joke for some in the newsroom ("We were just saying that maybe we should do a series on all the sleazy stuff we already do for series during sweeps," one newsworker told me).

Not everyone in the newsroom saw it as a joke, however. One reporter had been suddenly assigned to do a typically "sleazy" series on marital infidelity to try to blunt the ratings success of a similar series on a competing station, and took the unusual (and to some, heinous) step of sharing her frustrations with the local newspaper's television critic. She told the critic that the station's newsroom supervisors had forced the series upon her: "I told them I did not want to do it. I told them, 'This is going to be terrible, and my name's on it, and I don't like it.'" She added, however: "I thought about whether I wanted to get fired over this and decided it wasn't worth it."

Another reporter told me that he, too, had been forced to do series that he had not wanted to do, including one on black magic

and satanism for which, the reporter said, he had only been the "voice"; he had not written or produced it or even bothered to watch it when it aired. The reporter told me that he was considering leaving the station (he in fact did leave soon after for another newsroom), because while the station in the past had "kicked butt" in its daily news coverage, it now seemed to be "floundering." And he was unhappy about the station's obsession with ratings, especially the "overnights" that gave stations almost instantaneous feedback on how well they were doing against the competition:

> Say at ten o' clock, your numbers are down, for whatever reason. And the numbers come in early the next morning, and boy, they're scurrying around the newsroom, trying to figure out how to stop the bleeding. . . . And it just--I don't think--it certainly doesn't help the newsroom. I don't think it helps the viewers to try and "sexy" things up the next night and hopefully get some more viewers into the tent. I just think that overnights ratings thing has really, really hurt journalism throughout the country, because there's so much knee-jerk reaction.

But for the newsroom supervisors--the ones who served as a link between the reporters and the station managers, and the ones "scurrying around the newsroom, trying to figure out how to stop the bleeding"--the overnight ratings and the ratings system in general were central to the way they understood their jobs. "Our job is to sell eyeballs," said the executive news producer in charge of sweeps series. "And without them, we're out of business. The reality of television news is that a rating period is very important to us, and we need every moral advantage to have people watch us." Another newsroom manager quoted the news

director--his immediate superior--as saying that "sex sells." And, in response to the critics of series sleaze, this newsroom manager continued:

> Time and time and time and time and time again--the stuff that gets the highest ratings is the stuff that is, quote, the sleaziest. . . . You hear all this stuff about sleaze, but that's what people want. . . . If we put on a whole series about, uh--(pause)--nursing home problems or how the [local] school district is trying to rebuild itself or something like that, nobody would watch. And yet they sort of insist that we be these white knights. But if we do that, they don't support us. So what are we supposed to do?

The newsroom managers quoted above thus operated according to a different set of values than the rank-and-file reporters did. The reporters who complained about the overnights and the sleaze felt that the emphasis on ratings compromised their journalistic integrity and their ability to compete for news stories (we recall the reporter lamenting the fact that the newsroom used to "kick butt" on news coverage, but now was "floundering"). The newsroom supervisors, however, used the competition for ratings as a way of understanding and exerting control over their work. Their daily review of overnight ratings data served as a "strategic ritual" similar to the newsroom ritual of monitoring opposing stations' newscasts (see Auletta, 1992, p. 466). The supervisors used it to reassure themselves that they were not losing ground to their competition (again, clearly defined as the opposing news operations in the market, with the primary opponent being the station that was closest in the ratings to the focal news organization). They also strategically and ritualistically

used the ratings data to defend themselves against critics of sleaze--after all, they were only giving the audience what it wanted to see.

If the competition for ratings is ritualized in this way, it also is "enacted," just as the competition for news is. That is, it is mutually constructed by individuals and organizations acting in concert; stations and newsrooms program and counter-program their airwaves in continual reaction to what their competitors do. This mutually-enacted competition centered around ratings and sweeps serves the corporate interests of broadcasters, advertisers, and the ratings firms alike in that, as Streeter (1989, p. 10) suggests, it maintains "regularity and predictability" in the media industry and helps "form cultural and social bonds among managers" who share a taken-for-granted understanding that the ratings are to be taken seriously and used as a mutual basis of action. Obviously, economic constraints (especially in large markets with millions of dollars at stake during each ratings period) do limit the actions these managers can take; they <u>have</u> to do what they can to boost ratings in order to hold on to their jobs. But at the same time, it is important to recognize that the race for ratings is not solely a product of corporate coercion. Many use this "daily race" to make sense of and control their work. Yet it is through the taken-for-granted nature of this race--a "means not to know"--that the ratings system and corporate control of the media are perpetuated.

At the medium-market station (which again dominated its market in the numbers), newsworkers also participated in this race for ratings, even though there seemed to be no compelling economic reason to do so. The station produced special news series for ratings periods just as the top-20 station did. But in sharp contrast to their counterparts at the larger station, the smaller station's news managers felt the series made little or no difference in the ratings, based on the numbers from past sweeps periods. I asked the station's executive news producer why, then, they even bothered producing such series:

> Part of it's habit. I mean, we've done it. And we've done, from habit's standpoint, you know--we've done series forever, and it's hard to break that mold, to not do something special and not do something different. I think you do get a little bit of an edge. But boy, I really do think series don't really make that big a difference in viewing habits. I wish we could break the mold.

In this way, the executive producer and other newsroom managers with whom I spoke implicitly acknowledged that they were highly likely to remain number one in the ratings by the same margin over their opponents regardless of whether they prepared special material for sweeps. That is, ratings pressures and other economic constraints certainly did not appear to compel the production of such material. Yet the newsroom continued to produce sweeps series, in large part because that was what it had always done--it had become a "habit," as the executive producer called it. Sweeps had become an ordinary, routine part of the newsroom's culture.

Despite the lack of ratings pressure (one reporter noted that the station's newsworkers rarely were even told how their newscasts were faring in the ratings), the reporters responsible for producing sweeps series did experience other kinds of pressure. One veteran reporter told me that reporters producing their very first sweeps series were especially vulnerable:

> People who just start [producing series] get tons of information. We call it series stress. And they get so much information that they can't possibly report on all that information in three parts. So then they're frustrated, because they have all of this wonderful information that the public needs to know, but they don't have time to report it. And so you just really stress out when you do that.

I witnessed one such case of "series stress" as a young reporter struggled to complete her first sweeps series. The topic was single-parent families, hardly a sleazy subject (again, due to the lack of ratings pressure, the station's news managers saw little need to resort to sleaze). It was a topic particularly close to the reporter's heart in that she herself was a single parent. Prior to producing the series, the reporter told me she wanted to correct the stereotypes and misconceptions of viewers who held a more traditional view of the family and who sometimes looked down on single mothers.

But during production, the reporter ran into several constraints. First, she was given only one week to do research for the series, a time during which she was expected to help with election coverage and other newsroom tasks. Second, just as the veteran reporter had predicted, the reporter gathered far too

much information for the 10 minutes of air time she was allotted for the entire series. That led to long, frustrating sessions in the editing room as she struggled to cut down the story. Finally, the reporter was assigned to work with several different videographers, some of whom were inexperienced and did not gather the quality of video that she had wanted. After a particularly trying "shoot" with one such videographer, I tried to console the reporter by telling her that most viewers would not notice the flaws in the video. But she remained angry: "I'm trying to sell myself with this," she said. "I'm going to send this tape off to a news director, and he's going to look at the total package. And it [the video] reflects on what I'm doing."

"Series stress" thus resulted from ambitious reporters eager to advance their own careers (by moving up to larger markets) running into the ordinary constraints of television newswork--the constant deadlines, the emphasis on short, concise reports, the staffing shortages, and so forth. As already described, these constraints ultimately serve organizational interests; deadlines help news organizations process news, short and concise stories meet the perceived demands of the television format, and relatively small staffs of younger, less experienced employees save money. All of these constraints limited the control the reporter could exercise over her own work.

Yet after it was all over and the reporter had survived her bout with "series stress," she expressed satisfaction with the

completed series and said she hoped to do more in the future. In particular, she said she had enjoyed having more time to work on a story--the time constraints of working on a series were far less severe than the time constraints of everyday newswork. And she had enjoyed the change in her usual work routine: "I think working on series, you have your own schedule, and your days can fluctuate. So it was good in that sense. It broke it up [i.e., broke up the ordinary routine]."

In short, both the news managers and the reporters at the medium-market station used the sweeps as a way of understanding their work. The news managers participated in the routine of producing sweeps series because that was what they were used to doing; they had come to take it for granted that that was what they should do during sweeps periods, though they occasionally might grow tired of the routine ("I wish we could break the mold," the executive producer had sighed). Reporters used series as a way of exerting somewhat more control over their jobs in that they had more leeway in determining their daily schedules and reporting on topics of personal interest to them, and potentially as a way of getting better, higher-paying jobs.

But the station's participation in sweeps also ultimately served corporate interests. It allowed reporters a chance to try to further their individual career ambitions and a chance to do something slightly different without seriously challenging the usual, legitimated routines of newswork. It also legitimated the

ratings system itself. Even though news managers privately might question the need to participate in sweeps, their public participation in sweeps confirmed the importance and appropriateness of the quarterly ratings ritual and its role in maintaining regularity and predictability in the television industry.

Conclusion: The "Competitive Ethos"

The limitations of this study should be obvious; only two newsrooms were observed (the larger one for only a short period), and the findings are not necessarily generalizable to other television newsrooms in other markets, let alone to professionals working in other media and other mass communication occupations. Yet the findings do strongly indicate that competition in television organizations for news and ratings are enacted in everyday (or, in the case of sweeps, quarterly) rituals through which individual newsworkers make sense of their work and lives by evaluating their performance against that of a clearly defined set of opponents. That is, newsworkers ranging from rank-and-file reporters and videographers to newsroom supervisors draw upon competitive norms and rituals as <u>cultural resources</u> in managing and controlling their work and in enacting and reenacting their shared environment. They run a "daily race to see who's best," continually peeking over their shoulders to check on the progress of the runners in the lanes next to them.

Morgan (1986) describes these kinds of competitive norms and

rituals as a "competitive ethos." Noting first (p. 119) that American corporate culture is heavily influenced by an "ethic of competitive individualism"--the desire to win, to be number one--he goes on to argue that "corporate culture develops as an ethos . . . created and sustained by social processes, images, symbols, and rituals" (p. 123). And he suggests that such an ethos is central to the enactment of a shared environment: "A competitive ethos produces competitive environments" (emphasis added).

This suggests, then, that the competitive culture of television news is not solely determined by the political and economic structure of the oligopolistic broadcast industry. As already noted, the industry seeks regularity and predictability and tries to manipulate regulation to limit the potential economic threat posed by new competitors. Newsworkers, on the other hand, compete for news stories even in markets in which relatively weak ratings competition would not appear to compel such competition. Newsworkers may even participate in a competitive ritual while recognizing that the avowed purpose of the ritual is a sham--that producing sweeps series makes no difference in the ratings, for example. Again, they continue to participate in such rituals because that is part of their accustomed way of understanding and exerting control over their work and of exercising some degree of professional autonomy. The competitive environment they share with their opponents is largely one of their own mutual creation and not one totally

determined by economic constraints.

To be certain, economic constraints do play a significant role. They do influence the kinds of competition in which newsworkers engage; as one might expect, the fact that stations in the top-20 market were closer together in the ratings and that a great deal more money was at stake did place much more pressure on newsworkers there to compete for ratings by engaging in "sleaze." Even in the smaller market, newsworkers producing routine news coverage and special series for sweeps still had to operate within the usual constraints of newswork. In this way, newsworkers' autonomy and their degree of control over their work is significantly limited. And the manner in which competitive rituals and norms combine with other newsroom rituals and norms in serving corporate interests indicates that professional control of newswork is also to a large degree illusory--the competitive ethos is a professional ideology, a "means not to know," obscuring the links between everyday values and rituals in newswork and political and economic power, including continued corporate control of the media.

The policy implications of these findings are mixed. On the one hand, some may argue that regulatory efforts to increase the number of competing news outlets could improve the quality and diversity of news by lessening oligopolistic control of the media. That is, news operations not wedded to corporate control might be more free to foster different news values and

newsgathering routines serving interests other than corporate interests. The symbiotic relationship between powerful, legitimated institutions and news organizations might be altered in such a way as to promote possibilities for social change as well a more robust public discussion giving voice to more diverse points of view. Mainstream news organizations that otherwise might have little incentive to "break the mold" and offer more innovative news coverage might be forced to do so with more economic competition, or at least be prompted to invest more in their operations, as suggested by Lacy and Bernstein (1992) and others.

However, as noted at the outset, a substantial body of qualitative/critical research suggests that merely attempting via regulation to increase economic competition in the marketplace far from guarantees better and more diverse news. Streeter (1983, 1989), Bagdikian (1990), and others have argued that past putative efforts to increase competition have only contributed to increased concentration of control of the media industry. Similarly, Blumler (1991, p. 213) argues that "the ingrained free market ethos of the American culture fosters a presumption that all consequences of increased competition in the television marketplace will be beneficial," whereas in fact such consequences are likely to include an even greater emphasis on that which "has most immediate and arresting appeal" and that which "large conglomerates and middlemen of all kinds expect to

be most profitable."

The findings of this paper also seem to indicate the limitations of increased marketplace competition, specifically in the area of television news. First, observations at the top-20 market station showed that stations can and do respond to greater perceived competition with "sleazy" programming, or in other words that which "has most immediate and arresting appeal." (This is also in line with McManus's [1991] argument that while increased competition may promote increased investment in a station's news coverage, it does not necessarily follow that the station's news coverage will be better or more "objective.") Second, observations at the medium-market newsroom showed that a competitive newsroom culture can flourish even in a non-competitive market. If such a culture exists to some extent independently of economic structure, and if such a culture often contributes negatively to the quality of news, obviously more is needed than to tinker with the structure--the culture must be addressed as well.

That said, it also seems obvious that simply attempting to alter the culture though education also will not be enough. Two decades ago, Epstein (1974, pp. 267-268) said of network television news that attempts to improve coverage through "changing or educating the broadcasters" were not likely to succeed without "a structural change in network television which would effectively reorder the economic and political incentives."

Although he wrote about the networks, his words remain relevant for local television news today; one cannot hope to alter powerfully compelling cultural norms without also addressing the organizational and structural factors which do help sustain those norms and which in turn are served by those norms.

Hence, it is suggested that a two-pronged effort is needed--policymakers' attempts via structural change to increase the diversity of news in the marketplace should be accompanied by educators' efforts to foster different forms of news and newsgathering (in television and in other media) that do not center around cutthroat competition. Policymakers should not put undue faith in the power of the marketplace to cure the media's ills, but rather should try to restructure the industry along the lines of what Blumler (1991, p. 214) calls a "mixed television economy" featuring "a principled and an amply and securely funded public sector" that would be relatively free of corporate control and commercial pressures.

In addition to such efforts, educators should question the "competitive ethos" in the classroom. Such an ethos, after all, is simply one version of the "occupational ethos" which Blanchard and Christ (1993, chap. 4) passionately argue should not be reproduced by media education. That is, they argue that media educators should not indoctrinate their students into the standard occupational norms and routines and "means not to know," but should instead in the best spirit of a liberal education

contribute to a "self-directed cultural self-consciousness," a "high degree of control over one's field" [emphasis added]," "dedication to public service," and an "ethical commitment" (p. 62). Students who are taught to run a "daily race to see who's best," to compete for entry-level jobs at low wages and then fight among themselves for gradually higher-paying jobs in larger markets, are students whose degree of self-direction and control over their work is, as already argued, largely illusory. The news they produce tends to serve corporate interests at the expense of public service. And if what Kohn (1986) and others suggest is true--that competition is destructive and should be suffused with a spirit of cooperation--then it is unethical to teach students that they must compete in order to succeed in the organizational and occupational culture of the newsroom (see also Christians, Ferre, & Fackler, 1993, chap. 5).

At the very least, additional research is needed on the social aspects of journalism competition, with further examination of the circumstances under which different kinds of media workers and organizations compete or do not compete (see Bantz, 1985, pp. 237-239), as well as comparisons with the ways in which others compete in different social contexts like sports and business so that we might gain a broader "culturological" perspective on how competition is enacted in American life (see Schudson, 1991, pp. 151-155). Most importantly, the unquestioned and taken-for-granted competitive norms within journalism occupations ought to

be critically examined, questioned, and where necessary, challenged. It is suggested here that journalism educators, through their contacts with both present and future generations of journalists, are in a unique position to undertake that challenge.

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WHO OWNS PRIME TIME?
THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF
TELEVISION PROGRAM AND BROADCAST RIGHTS

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WHO OWNS PRIME TIME?: THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF TELEVISION PROGRAM AND BROADCAST RIGHTS

ABSTRACT

This paper looks at the intra-industry struggle between the producers of prime-time television programs and the three major U.S. television networks (ABC, CBS, NBC) over who should be allowed to own and syndicate prime-time entertainment television programming. The study looks specifically at the origins, evolution, and revision of the Financial Interest and Syndication Rules (FISRs) promulgated by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) that regulate network involvement in prime-time program production and distribution. Political economy and capitalist state theory are used to analyze and explain this case of industrial conflict.

WHO OWNS PRIME TIME?
THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF
TELEVISION PROGRAM AND BROADCAST RIGHTS

This paper takes as a case study the industrial struggle between television program producers and the three major U.S. television networks (ABC, CBS, NBC) over who should be allowed to own and syndicate prime-time television programming.[1] In 1990, the sale of network rerun and first-run syndication programs to television broadcasters generated revenues of $3.4 billion in the U.S. and $2.3 billion globally; while it is predicted that the total global value of this market will be $10.6 billion in 1995 (Kneale & Carnevale, 1991).

The economic significance of this market notwithstanding, this case study is more than an analysis of competition over revenue and profit shares between the television networks and Hollywood. Since the medium involved is network television, arguably the most pervasive and influential of present-day mass media, cultural, political, and social issues inevitably come into focus. Moreover, given that the common sense perception of network television as a powerful mass medium is widely held, there has been continuous pressure on the U.S. government to intervene in this and related industries. The various branches and agencies of the U.S. government have responded accordingly, with a wide range of laws and regulations governing the institution of television, including the business of television program production and syndication. The interaction of these institutional forces, through the individuals,

groups and organizations that constitute them, help to shape the general political-economic framework within which television production, distribution, and consumption take place.

Researchers who focus on media structures and practices, seek to show how institutional and organizational forms and processes affect the context in which the mass communicators work and the form and substance of media output (i.e., their content). This case study sheds light on those institutional forces and processes that have shaped the current structure and operation of the prime-time television production, distribution, and exhibition industries. More precisely, it focuses on the conjunction of institutional and organizational forces involved in a contest over who should have financial interest in network prime-time programming and who should be able to sell reruns or first-run programs to television stations.

The contest concerns the Financial Interest and Syndication Rules (FISRs)(1990), which Cantor and Cantor (1992, p. 45) call the "most important" Federal Communications Commission (FCC) regulation relating to prime-time television. The FCC promulgated the FISRs in 1970 (Federal Communications Commission, 1970a) and the Department of Justice (DoJ) subsequently incorporated them into a series of consent decrees to settle its antitrust action against the networks (United States v. National Broadcasting Co., 1978). These efforts sought to break up the concentration of the prime-time television program production, distribution, and exhibition and to curb the increasingly monopsonistic practices of the three

television networks. The FCC and DoJ charged that the networks were using access to prime time as a leverage against program producers to acquire from them financial interests and syndication rights. By reducing network control over program production and distribution, the FCC and DoJ hoped to reduce barriers to entry to this market and thereby encourage more independent production. Venturing to capitalize on the de-regulatory posture of the Reagan-appointed FCC, the three networks began a campaign in the early 1980s to gain repeal of the FISRs. While thwarted in their initial effort to gain repeal in the early 1980s, the networks did see major revisions in the rules a decade later which permitted them to enter television program production and distribution in a significant way.

THEORETICAL APPROACHES

The theoretical framework which guides this study is a combination of radical political economy and neo-Marxist and radical theories of the capitalist state. Political-economic media theory takes Marx's critique of capitalism as its starting point to demonstrate how this mode of production affects the form, substance and range of media output. Two major areas of attention within political economy are first, the structure of media ownership and control and second, the effects of the logic of capital on the media marketplace. In the first area we discover the process of concentration, which can be seen as the inevitable result of capitalistic competition. Thus, while capitalism is expanding ever

further into new domains, the capital generated in this process becomes increasingly concentrated in a few hands. Consequently, in the media sector there are fewer and fewer families and individuals owning and controlling increasingly larger corporations operating in an increasingly oligopolistic marketplace (Bagdikian, 1990; Schiller, 1990). The second area of research--on the operation of the media marketplace--shows how the profit motive that underlies the logic of capital results in "the reduction of independent media sources, concentration on the largest markets, avoidance of risk taking, [and] neglect of smaller and poorer sectors of the potential audience" (McQuail, 1987, p. 64).

Political economy, as the term implies, makes politics a central focus of concern. Indeed, the approach takes state intervention into the economy as an essential feature of contemporary capitalism. Accordingly, just as political-economic theory of the media is concerned with ownership and control, Marxists such as Miliband (1969) and power-structure analysts such as Domhoff (1983; 1990), are interested in the relationship between the capitalist class and the state. In this case study, the questions "who owns the media?" and "who rules the state?" are posed in an effort to explain the outcome of conflict involving these and other institutions.

Other political theorists focus on the relationship between the logic of capital and state policies. This approach begins with an analysis of the capital accumulation process and its various crisis tendencies, from which it then derives the form and function

of the capitalist state. The tendency toward systemic crisis requires the state to increasingly intervene into the economy in effort to produce countertendencies by reorganizing the processes of production, distribution and consumption. In this role, the state takes on the position of the "ideal collective capitalist," attempting to promote the long-term interests of capital as a whole through "discriminatory management of monopolistic competition" (Therborn, 1980, p. 89).

State officials and workers, constitute a "[s]tate managerial technocracy" (Therborn, 1980), that tends to operate in this manner due to its structural dependency upon the capital accumulation process from which the taxes for running the state are extracted. This makes state personnel especially sensitive to threats of a capital "investment strike" and severely limits the autonomy of the state. Also, because the state does not directly control capital, it can only indirectly intervene into the economy and this intervention is typically "reactive." This case study identifies the crises of accumulation and market failures in the television industry that prompt state regulation. The key question here is "What is the character of power and how is it exercised?" (Therborn, 1980, p. 131).

Still other political theorists stress the need to see the state as a site of struggle. The state or media are not simply instruments which the capitalist class use to advance its particular interests. Rather, the capitalist class, or a fraction thereof, must work in and through the state and media systems to

maintain its ruling-class status and resist challenges arising from nondominant groups and classes. Through the interaction of strategic forces and state structures, the state becomes a "vehicle for building and maintaining class power, without appearing to do so" (Mosco, 1989, p. 102), precisely because the structure of the state is biased toward capital. Jessop (1990) presents the concept of the "hegemonic project" to describe the process by which the hegemonic class (fraction) seeks to promote its long-term interests through mobilization of state officials, and relevant forces in "civil society," in support of its favored policies. It attempts to do so by casting these particular interests as being in the general interest of the nation as a whole (Poulantzas, 1975).

A hegemonic project is more likely to be successful if it can be linked up with the prevailing "accumulation strategy" or "mode of regulation" (Harvey, 1989), i.e., a particular way of organizing the production and distribution systems within capitalism. This study examines how the networks sought to use the state system to advance a hegemonic project to advance their interests and the various forms of resistance they met and how they managed to link their project to the larger project of the hegemonic fraction of the capitalist class to effect a new phase of capitalism described variously as "post-industrial society," "techno-capitalism" (Kellner 1989), "post-Fordism," or a "regime of flexible accumulation."

HISTORY OF THE FINANCIAL INTEREST AND SYNDICATION RULES

McChesney (1991, p. 109) argues that the advertiser-supported, national-network radio broadcasting system became economically consolidated by 1932 or 1933; was politically consolidated with the Communications Act of 1934 which established the FCC; and, became ideologically consolidated shortly thereafter. From the late 1930s on, the U.S. government and most of the public accepted the basic structure and operation of broadcasting as natural and inevitable; a system which required, on the part of the government, only a minimal amount of fine-tuning to curb excesses by individual broadcasters or the abuse of network power. The latter task turned out to be highly problematic given the expansionary logic of capital. The problems were merely transferred into the emerging structure of television in the 1950s. By the late 1950s, NBC and CBS dominated the television broadcast marketplace; ABC lagged well behind; DuMont had folded; and, UHF operations were floundering.

Concern about the high level concentration of the television broadcasting industry led Congress to authorize an inquiry into network structures and operations. The resulting "Barrow Report" (Federal Communications Commission, 1958), focusing primarily on television network broadcasting, examined "the structure, operations, and practices of the networks in their relationships with other components of the industry" (p. 3). However, the report did not address the issue of program production and procurement, thus the Commission initiated another investigatory study in 1959 (Federal Communications Commission, 1959) which generated reports

in 1960, 1963 (both reproduced in U.S. House. Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce, 1963), and 1965 (Federal Communications Commission, 1965b). The reports ultimately led to the proposal (Federal Communications Commission, 1965a) and promulgation of the FISRs in 1970 (Federal Communications Commission, 1970).

The studies of network program production and acquisition practices revealed that the three networks--usually as a quid pro quo for initial financing and eventual broadcasting of a program or series--would require program producers to give them a share of the profits (often 50%) earned by a program or series from its network runs; the right to distribute the program in domestic and foreign markets; the rights to share in the profits from domestic and foreign syndication sales; the exploitation rights and a share of profits from merchandising; and the right to share in other non-broadcast interests (e.g., motion pictures, books, magazine stories and articles, phonograph records and plays derived from the programs or series)(Federal Communications Commission, 1965a, p. 2151). The studies also found that with financial control came stultifying creative control, with network insistence on regular series formats and program formulas. In the FCC's 1965 Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (1965a, p. 2154), in which the FISRs were first proposed, the Commission found that the results of network program practices had been to concentrate ownership of program rights and creative control in the hands of the networks to the detriment of independent producers.

To address this growing centralization of prime-time programming in the hands of the networks, the FCC proposed to restrict the networks' involvement in domestic and foreign syndication and to limit the amount of programming in which it had direct financial interest to 50% of prime time or a total of 14 hours a week, whichever was greater (1965a, p. 2160). The FCC hoped that the rules would strengthen independent program production and generate new sources of first-run syndicated programming which might in turn strengthen UHF operations and facilitate the rise of a fourth network (1965a, p. 2158).

For five years after the FCC proposed rules on network program practices the networks, group broadcast operators, the Hollywood majors and independents, and others debated and argued over the form and content of the FISRs and Prime Time Access Rules. In the meantime, the FCC commissioned further research on levels of concentration in prime-time program production which confirmed that the degree of network control of their evening schedules had been steadily increasing, and substantially so since the 1965 proposal (Federal Communications Commission, 1970, p. 402). The record showed that networks were taking over more and more of their affiliates' prime time; that increased network control over prime time had provided increased leverage over program producers for obtaining ancillary rights; that there seemed to be a high correlation between giving up those rights and getting into a network prime-time schedule; and, that the amount of independently produced and packaged prime-time network programming had declined

sharply between 1957 and 1968 (from 32.8% to 3.3%)(Federal Communications Commission, 1970, p. 389). The FCC was shown that programming commissioned by advertisers, the dominant form of production financing in radio broadcasting and early television, had virtually disappeared by the late 1960s.

After reviewing this record the FCC's majority concluded that: "The public interest requires limitation on network control and an increase in the opportunity for development of truly independent sources of prime time programming" (Federal Communications Commission, 1970, p. 394). With this goal in mind the FCC adopted the FISRs and the Prime Time Access Rules (PTAR). The Financial Interest Rule prohibited the networks from acquiring any financial interest in programs, or in their distribution, that were independently produced, other than the network exhibition right itself. The Syndication Rule prohibited the networks from syndicating television programs to domestic television stations for off-network exhibition; distributing programs in foreign markets of which the network was not the sole producer; or from participation in profit-sharing arrangements involving these activities. The Prime Time Access Rule (1990) limited the networks from scheduling no more than three hours of prime-time programming in the top 50 markets during the four hours of prime time each night.

The rules were promulgated in the midst of broad social and political activism that questioned and challenged the structure and operation of many major social institutions, including the mass media. The Supreme Court's upholding of the Fairness Doctrine in

1969 in Red Lion v. Federal Communications Commission, a decision that in many ways signals the peak moment of FCC reform of the broadcast media, clearly had emboldened the FCC majority, for they cite it a number of times in the report and order. For the FCC, the FISRs and the PTAR represented yet another means for shaking up the dominant vested interests in television, i.e., the networks, and demonstrating some "autonomy" from such interests. At the same time the FCC was acting to re-introduce competition into a market that, following the logic of capital, had become highly concentrated. As the political environment, state personnel, and the logic of capital shifted, the necessity of the rules increasingly came into question.

THE NETWORKS AND THE EFFORT TO REPEAL THE FISRS

In his biography, Leonard Goldenson (1991, p. 452), chair of ABC, says that "[f]rom the moment it became clear that Reagan's FCC was intent on deregulation, all three networks began to push for rescission of the Financial Interest and Syndication Rules." ABC's general counsel, Everett H. Erlick, among others, suggested to FCC Chairperson Fowler that the proceedings be reopened since competition from cable and independent stations had changed the marketplace. In Erlick's view, the networks remained "shackled with rules written for conditions, if they ever existed, that [were] twenty years old" (Goldenson, 1991, p. 453). The networks claimed that they were at a competitive disadvantage against the new media, particularly pay-cable services such as HBO and Cinemax,

because they could not syndicate or have financial interest in television programming while their competitors could. The "unfair competitive advantage" argument was working for the networks with regards to other policy issues and they assumed it would work in helping to win repeal of the FISRs. The networks and broadcasters had gained, or were in the processing of gaining, loosened restrictions on ownership concentration (number of stations a company could own and cross-ownership rules); relaxed ascertainment procedures; suspension of the Fairness Doctrine; reduced FCC supervision of children's programming; extended license terms; and, eased renewal procedures, which aimed at limiting costly challenges to broadcast licenses. On all of these issues the networks and aligned broadcasters were seeking to reverse the gains made through the earlier period of the "popular" struggles of the media reform movement.

The networks' efforts were part of a larger big business-led political attack on reformist legislation and regulation that had already begun in the early 1970s.[2] Rowland (1982a) places the beginning of the communications deregulation trend at roughly this time also. Horowitz (1989, p. 82) argues that "[m]ore than any other factor, it was the growth of regulation which prompted the business political counterattack." Much of the mass media deregulatory effort was targeted precisely at the policy reform movement, representing women, children, blacks, Hispanics and other minority interests, that had successfully increased media accessibility through legislation, regulation and adjudication.

But given the reassertion of corporate power in the form of a "hegemonic project" to reverse such access, and the simultaneous decline of political and social activism (Domhoff, 1990, p. 282), the policy gains made by the media reform movement were an easy target; they had been only an "illusion of fulfillment" (Rowland, 1982b). However, when it came to the FISRs the networks ran up against a more formidable foe, the Hollywood production community, which was able temporarily to derail the networks' deregulatory train.

The networks' "hegemonic project" was to gain the revocation of a number of legislative and regulatory constraints, including the FISRs, that they claimed prevented them from competing with emerging cable and video media on equal terms. They built their case on the findings of the FCC's Network Inquiry Special Staff [hereinafter NISS] report (Federal Communications Commission. Network Inquiry Special Staff, 1980) that the FISRs were based on "dubious" premises and caused inefficiencies in the television program marketplace. The NISS recommended that instead of the FISRs and similar policies, the FCC should engage in accelerated elimination of barriers to entry for new television delivery systems which could serve as the foundation for new networks. The findings of the NISS became the basis upon which the FCC, responding to the urging of the networks, built its Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (Federal Communications Commission, 1982) released in June 1982, that announced the FCC's reconsideration of the FISRs and possible amendment or repeal thereof.

This announcement triggered an intense amount of activity by industry owners, officers and lobbyists, media workers, including journalists, media activists, and government officials. Most of the effort was aimed at opinion formation inside and outside of the state. The networks case stressed the competitive disadvantage the networks faced vis-a-vis pay cable services; that these services had begun to be competitive bidders for prime-time programming; and, that the concentration of program production in the hands of the Hollywood majors had increased (Mulholland 1982, p. 65). The affiliates, fearing that the networks might be inclined to begin cutting back on program expenditures in an increasingly competitive environment, fell in line with the networks.

The Committee for Prudent Deregulation, organized by and comprised of syndicators, producers and independent stations, led the forces against rescission of the FISRs.[3] The Committee's position was that repeal would harm independent tv stations (Taffner, 1982, p. 37). The opponents of repeal predicted that the networks would favor their owned-and-operated stations and their respective affiliates in the syndication market by making sure they got the best off-network programming, instead of competing independent stations. They also predicted that the networks would "warehouse" successful prime-time series, i.e., withhold them from the syndication market until they were long into their network run or until the network run was completed, instead of release them for syndication while they were at the peak of their popularity.

The independent stations had begun to make significant inroads

into the network's share of prime-time. The total number of independent stations went from 73 in 38 markets in 1972 to 165 in 78 markets in 1982 (U.S. House. Committee on Energy and Commerce, 1983, p. 236), while their prime-time audience share went from an estimated 5% in 1972 to 16% by 1982 (Ryan, 1983, p. 49). Meanwhile, the networks' share of the prime-time audience had fallen from 90% in 1972 to 70% by 1982 (U.S. House. Committee on Energy and Commerce, 1983, p. 236). The members of the Association of Independent Television Stations, Inc. (INTV) "universally" agreed "that the unfettered availability of the most popular, most current off-network syndicated programs" had been the key to their success (U.S. House. Committee on Energy and Commerce, 1983, p. 198). Such shows were scheduled during the 4-8 pm "fringe day-part" hours and had become a popular alternative to the news and information programs run by the networks during this period.

The threat to independent stations brought advertisers into the debate on the side of the opponents of repeal. The Association of National Advertisers voted for retention of the FISRs based on in-house research demonstrating that advertising rates were 20-60% lower in markets with competitive independent broadcasters (Ryan, 1983, p. 49). The American Association of Advertising Agencies (AAAA) supported holding off on repeal for a few more years until the new technologies, such as cable, videocassettes, low-power television, direct satellite broadcasting, and others were more developed (Who's saying what, 1983, p. 66).

Finally, the issue was cast by opponents of repeal as a matter

of "life or death for the small producer and/or distributor" (Taffner, 1982, p. 37). Norman Lear of Embassy Communications and Tandem Productions ("All in the Family," "Maude," "The Jeffersons"), Mel Blumenthal, executive vice-president of MTM Productions ("Mary Tyler Moore," "Hill Street Blues," "St. Elsewhere"), and Leonard Hill, partner in Hill/Madelker Films (producers of tv movies and mini-series), led the campaign by the independent producers. The large independent companies, such as Embassy/Tandem and MTM, were primarily concerned about losing the big pay-offs that come with the sale of hit TV shows in the syndication market. They claimed that this income was essential for recovering the deficits accrued over the course of a network run because the network license fee did not cover production costs and that the possibly big payoff in syndication served as a major incentive to enter and remain in the business (U.S. Senate. Committee on Science, Commerce and Transportation, 1984, p. 80).

The independents also argued that the rules preserved a certain amount of creative autonomy from the networks. The independents, knowing they had a chance of recovering any deficits in the syndication market, often would spend more in production than the networks were willing to pay (Blumenthal, 1983, p. 2). At the very least, separating control of distribution from production was a good idea per se, since the networks were only interested in the largest possible audience with the right demographics, while the producer had interests beyond network exhibition and therefore tended to be more experimental than the networks (Blumenthal, 1983,

p. 2).

Media-reform and other activist groups generally came down on the side of retention. Many of them joined the Committee Against Network Monopoly, made up of 37 organizations including representatives from consumer, religious, labor, minority, elderly, and other significant public interest groups. Repeating pretty much the same arguments as the production community and independent broadcasters, the Committee (U.S. House. Committee on Energy and Commerce, 1983, p. 467) argued that "network dominance persists in the video marketplace" and the rules, while only a "palliative" and not a "cure" for this domination, had served the public interests "by allowing greater creative and financial independence to the creative community by reducing the three major networks' control over what [U.S] Americans may view" (p. 466). The networks were charged with failing to "serve special audiences," consequently the rules, which provided some space for competitors, were the best bet for "opportunities for greater diversity" (p. 468).

Taking a compromise position, the Storer Broadcasting Co. and Capital Cities Communications, urged repeal of the financial interest rule but retention of some type of restrictions on network syndication to guard against "warehousing" (Sobel, 1982, p. 39). This compromise position recognized the long-term interests of the networks in deregulation but sought to keep some restrictions on them until the new media were established. This position could be seen as the one favored by the hegemonic fraction of the capitalist class as a whole. It is close to the stand taken by advertisers,

particularly the AAAA, who were primarily interested in television as a marketing medium and thus the national networks' well-being in the long term.

The highlights of the network repeal effort in 1983 are as follows. The FCC experienced a split between Fowler and other Commissioners as the latter stepped back from total repeal to the compromise position put forward by Storer and Capital Cities. The Department of Justice, which would have had to revisit the consent decrees which had incorporated the FISRs, also initially took this position until instructed to withdraw it by President Reagan late in the year. Congress joined the fray at the behest of the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), headed by Jack Valenti, one of Washington's most powerful and well-paid lobbyists. A group of California Congresspersons, along with Timothy Wirth, the influential chair of the House's Subcommittee on Telecommunications, introduced and heard testimony on bills that would have deprived the FCC of authorization to repeal the rules for 5 years. The FCC and the Congress were headed on a collision course in the late-summer, early-fall of 1983, after the former had issued its tentative compromise decision in August (Federal Communications Commission, 1983) and moved toward adopting it and the latter moved toward imposing a moratorium on this action.

In October, it became apparent that Reagan was following the conflict with strong interest, having discussed it with Fowler and his cabinet on at least two occasions. In early November Reagan intervened on behalf of his old friends in Hollywood, especially

Lew Wasserman who helped launch Reagan's political career (Williams, 1989, p. 175; Goldenson, 1991, p. 454), and called for a legislated two-year moratorium on FCC action in this matter. Shortly thereafter, Fowler took the initiative out of the hands of Congress and self-imposed a 6-month moratorium on the proceedings. The FCC, knowing Reagan's views on the matter, left it on the shelf through the remainder of his presidency.

THE CASE OF THE FISRS AND THEORETICAL DISCUSSION THEREOF

Four key developments required the FCC to reconsider and revise the rules in 1991. First came the rise of the Fox television network and its petition in January 1990 to be exempted from the rules. Then, in November, came the expiration of certain restrictions on the networks imposed by the consent decrees, particularly the limits on the number of hours of prime-time programming that could be produced by the networks in-house. Thirdly, by the end of 1990, four of the major Hollywood filmed-entertainment companies--Twentieth-Century Fox, Columbia, MCA/Universal and MGM/United Artists--had become subsidiaries of transnational corporations based outside of the U.S. (News Corporation, Sony, Matsushita, and Pathe, respectively). The extent to which the rules were shifting money "from one pocket to another," as predicted by Chairman Birch 20 years earlier (FCC, 1970a, p. 416), now became an issue of protecting the interests of national capital versus international capital. Additionally, the rules basically prohibited the merger of the remaining U.S.-based

filmed-entertainment producers with either of the three networks thereby blocking the emergence of a potentially more powerful, vertically-integrated entertainment conglomerate which could compete in the international marketplace.

Finally, by 1990 the three networks share of the prime-time audience had dipped to 65%, down from 95% when the rules were first promulgated in 1970, while the independent share was up to 19%. Basic cable now took 14% of the prime-time audience, pay cable had 6%, and PBS and other cable accounted for 19% (Andrews, 1990, p. D1). The FCC (20 March 1991, p. 11720) found that the networks monopsonistic power had pretty much dissipated; each network purchased only 16% of prime-time entertainment programming and garnered only 22% of the audiences viewing such programming. At the same time the trend toward concentration in the program supply and program syndication markets had markedly increased (p. 11720) with the large studios providing the networks with over 70% of their programming in 1990 as opposed to just 39% in 1970 (The stale rules, 1990, p. A32). At the same time, Fox, Paramount, MCA and Disney had moved significantly into broadcasting themselves, by buying up independent television stations.

The claims by the networks that the FISRs jeopardized their continuing investment in high-priced programming, and thus the future quality of "free broadcast television," was a clear threat to state officials of a possible "investment strike." The network's were also better able this time around to cast their particular interests in repeal of the FISRs as being in the

national interests. Along these lines, NBC submitted a statement to the FCC in November 1990 arguing that the "declining competitive position" of the networks threatened "their continued ability to provide the levels of news, sports, and entertainment programs that the public now takes for granted" (cited in McManus, 1990, p. 10). Once again the various agencies and cabinet departments of the federal government dealing with communications came down on the side of significant revision (Department of Commerce and National Telecommunications and Information Agency) or repeal (Department of Justice and the staff of the Federal Trade Commission) of the rules. When President Bush's Council of Economic Advisors recommended repeal, it became clear in which direction his administration was leaning (Aversa, 18 February 1991, p. 11).

In April 1991, a FCC majority, once again voting against its Chair (3-2), rejected outright repeal of the rules and proposed a compromise that significantly relaxed the rules. The compromise (Federal Communications Commission, 6 June 1991), was widely treated in the press as a disappointment for the networks (Kneale and Carnevale, 1991, p. A1; The FCC cages the networks, 1991, p. A24; Aversa, 15 April 1991, p. 37). However, a close reading of the compromise position reveals that the FCC permitted the networks to enter into several new lines-of-business from which they previously had been barred. Of vital importance is their near total freedom in the international program production and distribution marketplace. This provision was a response to the request of House Energy and Commerce Committee Chairman John

Dingell, who repeatedly raised the issue of U.S. competitiveness and had threatened to intervene in the FCC proceedings unless this were taken into account (Wharton, 1991, p. 1).

Although the FCC's April 1991 decision did relax the FISRs, it still contradicted the deeper logic of capital that necessitated total deregulation of the prime-time program marketplace in order for the networks to be competitive within a flexible capital accumulation regime. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit, in Chicago, ratified this logic in November 1992, when it found the FCC's revisions of the FISRs "arbitrary and capricious" (Shurz Communications v. FCC). The court demanded that the FCC provide better justification for the revised rules or come up with a new set of rules that would meet with its approval. In April 1993, in a decision seen as favoring the networks, the FCC voted to lift most of the restrictions imposed by the FISRs (Federal Communications Commission, 1993). The FCC permitted the networks to once again take a stake in programs produced by out of house, to take a share of the rerun sales when the programs are syndicated, and to produce and own as much of their prime-time schedule as they wish. The FCC continued to prohibit the networks from syndicating prime-time programming themselves for two years. This requires the networks to use an outside company to syndicate programming produced both in-house and by outsiders and also prevents them from entering into the first-run syndication business. Furthermore, the FCC decision was limited in its effect by the continuation of the 1980 consent decrees. Nevertheless, the

FCC voted to repeal all remaining restrictions on the networks two years after the anticipated lifting of the consent decrees.

The eventual repeal of the FISRs, as the well as the developments leading up to it, can be explained using the theoretical framework developed at the outset of this paper. Turning to the first area of theoretical concern--who owns? and who rules?--the case study demonstrates the central role of the capitalist class, rather than the public or government officials, in shaping and controlling the mass media and the use of the state by this class to promote their general as well as particular interests. For example, Reagan's intervention on behalf of the his friends in Hollywood in 1983 can be seen as the workings of an interlocking network of the power elite. The intervention of the Bush administration on behalf of the networks can also be seen in this light. Schechter (1991, p. 25) suggests that the networks stood strongly behind Bush during the Gulf War, and Kellner (1990, p. 164) says the networks were soft on Bush even before that, by refusing to air a series of controversial and revealing stories about Bush the candidate, because they were seeking rescission of the FISRs and needed his help. Such findings lead us to recognize the individual subjective positions and backgrounds of those who govern, for this <u>can</u> be determining in policy outcomes, though in both cases the intervention could be seen as either contradictory to or in conformance with the long-term interests of capital as a whole, i.e., either as inhibiting the inevitable repeal of the FISRs or as legitimately preserving competition in the prime-time

program marketplace. Consequently, these arguably contingent outcomes are explained better when contextualized within the institutional logic of the media marketplace.

The determination of media and state structures and processes by the logic of capital, the second area of theoretical concern for political economy, is definitely revealed in this case study. For example, the networks' effort to gain repeal of the FISRs beginning in the early 1980s, can be seen as part of a larger hegemonic project of the dominant fraction of capital, in the guise of "deregulation," to move from the rigidity of Fordism and Keynesianism, which no longer could contain the inherent contradictions of capitalism, to a system of "flexible accumulation." This new accumulation strategy is based on small-batch production, "just-in-time" delivery of producer goods, and the general mobility of productive capital on a global scale (Harvey, 1989). Recent changes in network program purchasing and scheduling practices reflect this new accumulation strategy. The significant decrease in the number of episodes of a series ordered by the networks each season, from over 30 to as few as five or six, is an example of "just-in-time" and small-batch production strategies. The networks' strategy to increase flexibility in capital accumulation is also reflected in the increasing irregularity in prime-time programming schedules.

Additionally, after many continuous years of super profits, the networks began to see their profits level-off somewhat (CBS sees dip, 1983, p. 162; The phoenix ariseth, 1983, p. 121). Unable

to count on guaranteed audiences, and facing rising labor costs, stagnating profits, and increasing competition from new media, the networks sought to restructure their business practices and enter new markets. They were particularly interested in international syndication and co-production, however, the FISRs restricted them from entering these markets. Thus the networks were regarded by foreign broadcasters and producers "as the most rigid potential partners to work with" (Guider, 1991, p. 27, emphasis added). In this case, the networks hegemonic project to gain repeal of the FISRs and other regulations that restricted their business activities, converged with the emergent accumulation strategy of the hegemonic fraction of capital based on flexibility and internationalization. Acting as "ideal collective capitalist," the state permitted the networks to enter into the international marketplace unfettered under the new FISRs adopted by the FCC in 1991.

The case study also bears on the third area of theoretical focus; that which takes the media and the state as sites of struggles. For example, we saw that the FISRs were adopted in an era of broad social activism, including the media reform movement, and that the beginning of repeal efforts came in the midst of big business's move toward deregulation. The case of the FISRs is bound up with intraclass conflict as well. Here the state responded to the interests of one fraction of monopoly capital, the major Hollywood producers and their small capital allies, independent producers, as network monopsony began, in the 1960s, to

threaten the monopoly profits of the former and the very existence of the latter. The formal requirements on the state, particularly the FCC, to promote a diversity of program sources and broadcast media outlets, gave Hollywood and its allies the ability to promote their particular interests as the general interests of the nation as a whole.

Given the domination of the state by capital, a viable public television program production system never emerged as an alternative, notwithstanding the establishment of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting at this time. The networks, in turn, were able to reverse the state's position, through articulation of a hegemonic project that stressed the viability of "free" broadcast television.[4] In this regard, they argued that restrictions on their business activities would lead them to abandon many areas and types of programming which the U.S. public had come to expect. That the networks were concerned with more than just their national audience share is clear from the arguments they made based on global competitiveness. These became especially potent as the Hollywood majors increasingly came under the control of foreign capital. We see here both the state as a site of class struggle but also the workings of the bias of state structures toward the interests of fragments of national capital as well as capital as a whole.

Accordingly, this case study demonstrates that political-economic communications theory and neo-Marxist and radical theories of the capitalist state can be useful tools for guiding formal

investigations into institutional and industrial conflict, as well as providing explanations for what is discovered. These tools and the knowledge they generate give us the understanding we need to critique current media and state structures and practices, so that we may begin to move toward ones that are more democratic and participatory.

NOTES

1.Cantor and Cantor (1992, p. 2) define prime-time television as including: "programs produced in Hollywood and elsewhere for distribution to both U.S. and international audiences. These programs consist of series, serials, specials, movies made for television, and miniseries."

2.The airline, natural gas and financial services industries were deregulated during the years of the Carter presidency.

3.In a revealing example of the "revolving door" between government and industry, Dean Burch, the former FCC chair who initially opposed the FISRs when they were promulgated in 1970, now served as co-counsel for the Committee for Prudent Deregulation.

4.Of course broadcast television is not "free." Bagdikian (1990, p. 147) estimates that advertisers spend about $300 a year on each television household which they recover by marking-up the prices on the advertised product.

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PROTEST IN THE NEWS:

IMAGES OF PROTESTERS IN CANADIAN AND U.S. NETWORK NEWS

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PROTEST IN THE NEWS:

IMAGES OF PROTESTERS IN CANADIAN AND U.S. NETWORK NEWS

Introduction

One of the main themes in recent research on network television news is the degree of reliance on institutional sources and agenda setting (Bagdikian, 1987; DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1987; Entman, 1989; Herman & Chomsky, 1988; Hoynes & Croteau, 1989; Kellner, 1990; Soley, 1989). The interdependence between media and the political and economic systems has been said to produce a general message system which by and large does not challenge the conventional wisdom about the nature of our political and economic systems.

The emerging perspective on the institutional spin or tone of television news holds that institutional elites' almost routine access to media has a significant influence on the tone of news coverage. Another way to examine the news media's relationship to the dominant institutions in modern society is by looking at how media treat perspectives which diverge from the institutional conventional wisdom. That is, beyond looking at the kinds of perspectives which dominate the news, it is important to identify what kinds of perspectives are excluded or downplayed in the news.

Beyond voting or public opinion polls, grassroots perspectives generally are ignored or discounted. Social protest, person-in-the-street interviews and eyewitness sound bites are virtually the only way ordinary citizens are heard or seen in the news.

The research reported here focuses on the treatment of

participants in social protest stories covered in television news This paper examines news stories which deal with social protest of all kinds. Data are drawn from the U.S. network news broadcasts (ABC, CBS, NBC) and Canadian national news (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) as a means of comparing how different media systems deal with both foreign and domestic protest.

Contextual Factors in Comparing the U.S. and Canada

The use of Canadian and U.S. television news programs provides a basis for comparison and contrast between the two media systems. There are several political and economic reasons why news coverage of domestic and foreign protest should be treated differently.

Differences in political systems: While both the U.S. and Canada have representative political bodies, Canada's parliamentary system allows for greater multi-party representation and thus a broader political spectrum and debate. The two party system in the U.S. seems to foster a much more narrow centrism (Herman and Chomsky, 1988).

Differences in media financing: By choosing CBC news, a publicly financed entity, we have a contrast in news values. The drive for ratings and financing via advertising in the U.S. shapes the news in at least two ways-- news is thought to need to entertain in order to maintain an audience. The funding mechanism of advertising also creates direct links to financial institutions which regard grassroots perppectives or social change as a threat to the status quo. On the other hand, Canadian news is not as impelled toward entertainment values and

with independent governance can take cover positions more independent of dominant economic institutions.

U.S. role as a superpower: Perhaps the most important factor in reporting on the world is the United States' position as sole superpower in the post Cold War world. While there are similarities between U.S. and Canadian government policies, there are also important differences. While sharing "Western" values with the U.S., Canada has a more neutral posture in many cases (Canada's relations with Cuba being a significant one). As a superpower, the U.S. government must frequently mobilize the population for support of military action. The events of the 1991 Persian Gulf War make clear how the U.S. media aligned themselves with U.S. policy (Kellner, 1992). Though publicly funded, CBC news seems to make more of an effort to bring a global perspective to its news, reflecting the fact that CBC is modeled after the BBC.

The differences described above should be reflected in coverage of protest. The broader political mainstream in Canada means protest on many issues will not be as marginalized in Canada as it is in U.S. network news. Greater independence in funding for CBC should lend toward less of an entertainment or spectacle orientation in covering protest movements. Finally, the superpower role of the U.S. necessitates greater public opinion mobilization than in Canada. Thus, contrasting perspectives which challenge the government's foreign policies are less likely to be given full voice in U.S. news in comparison to Canadian news. These differences are further developed in the review of literature on media and protest.

How news treats protest is important in societies which project democratic values and processes and is an aspect of how citizen voices are heard through means other than voting or public opinion reporting. By looking at two countries with representative political systems, we can see how media systems vary in their treatment of ordinary peoples' perspectives.

Previous research and the issues involved in coverage of protest are addressed in the next section. The remainder of the paper will report a qualitative data analysis of two nine week monitoring periods (1989, 1992) of both Canadian and U.S. network news.

Review of Related Research

Most of the research on media and protest has focused on single issue concerns or protests from a specific era. Not surprisingly, the anti-war movement of the 1960's and early 1970's is the subject of much of the initial research in this area.

In his seminal work on the relationship between the anti-war movement and the nation's media over the course of the Vietnam war, Gitlin (1980) identified a symbiosis between media and the anti-war protesters. The media, by and large, covered the movement as spectacle, focusing on the counter cultural characteristics of the participants in protest. Gitlin says the net effect was to keep the movement marginalized vis a vis larger American society. As the movement grew and came to reflect broader societal representation, the media continued to focus more on the violent tendencies within the movement.

While predominantly nonviolent, the movement's need for media to spread its message and expand its base and the media's use of the movement to provide conflict and tension created an escalation of tactics by some within that movement to maintain attention. Ongoing, peaceful protest, from the media's viewpoint, was an "old story." Conflict and violence, especially for television cameras, was a means of maintaining attention. Gitlin concludes these media conventions encouraged the same extremists they deplored.

Shoemaker's (1982) experiments in the definition of deviant political groups affirmed that the more closely a group's concerns reflect elite concerns, the more likely they are to be incorporated within a prevailing news frame. Further, U.S. media support "centrist" political groupings by delegitimizing deviant political groups. In framing deviant groups as ridiculous and eccentric, they are cast as less legitimate.

Similarly, Wolfsfeld (1984) identifies a competitive symbiosis between the press and protest movements where each relies on the other to meet their individual goals. Wolfsfeld maintains protest leaders are most interested in persuading others while media use sensation to frame protest stories and make them "interesting." The net result is a tendency to concentrate on fringe elements as media pick the news peg which has most relevance for their needs.

Jensen's (1987) study of media discourse looked at two protests-- one against a nuclear power plant and the other the 1981 Labor Solidarity march of union and working people. Coverage of the nuclear protest addressed the cost of security

and the role of police in protecting the plant. Jensen maintains such a focus contains an unspoken presupposition about protesters' proclivity for violence. Other images conveyed also emphasized the spectacle of protest-- a "party" atmosphere and a lack of articulation of protesters' goals and beliefs.

Gitlin says this situation creates a routinization of coverage by creating frames or "persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation and presentation of selective emphasis and exclusion by which symbol handlers routinely organize discourse" (1980, p. 7).

In the U.S., these frames of protest and images of protesters primarily rely on and serve to reinforce the dominant frames used in the Vietnam era protests. Media almost assuredly will do two things when covering protests-- evoke images of the 60's movements and discuss whether the protesters (as opposed to the police) were peaceful or violent.

Gamson (1989) identifies a negative element of frames. He says frames in the news are frequently drawn from shared cultural narratives and myths. One of the consequences of the reliance on frames is the reinforcement or repackaging of old stereotypes and the linkage of old truisms and conventional wisdom to new situations and contexts. While such techniques may make news more comprehensible for news consumers, they also serve to impose old prejudices and stereotypes on situations which may be inappropriate.

Parenti (1986) summarized the themes and patterns of media coverage of protest in defining 6 characteristics of media

coverage:

Scarcity of context-- reasons and rationale for protest are rarely given. When the rationale for protest or articulation of the complexity of issues involved in the protest are not presented, the protest takes on a more spectacle-oriented tone.

Trivialization-- by ignoring or downplaying the substance of protest, irrational or frivolous motives are ascribed to protesters and are emphasized in coverage of the protest.

Marginalization-- despite the fact that protests are frequently broad based and involve a cross section of society, media emphasize the deviant elements of people involved in these movements.

False balance-- When counter demonstrators appear at mass protests, they are given equal, if not greater attention, than the protesters who usually outnumber counter demonstrators geometrically. Media are attracted to the heightened possibility of conflict between demonstrators and counter demonstrators.

Undercounting-- officials often downplay the size of the protest. Official figures are usually much less than independent assessments. There is little definitive methodology used in arriving at a figure or estimate-- the presiding officer's assessment is given authoritative weight by virtue of the office, not by any expertise in calculating the number of protesters.

Omission-- As protest becomes part of the routine, it is less likely to receive ongoing coverage. Media frequently disdain ongoing coverage by saying: "We've done that before." Such a perspective, absent an escalation of protest tactics (violence), allows media to rationalize away the necessity of

covering grass roots perspectives.

The more protest challenges the conventional wisdom of media elites and their institutional sources, the more likely the media will discount or ignore protesters as sources and turn to media designated experts to articulate issues. For example, Gamson and Modigliani's (1989) analysis of nuclear power issues found that the media tend to ignore protest perspectives and move to more established critics. The alternative energy ("soft paths") perspective was not cast as a viable alternative to nuclear power because it was a direct challenge to energy interests. The more mainstream critiques of public accountability of the nuclear industry and nuclear power's lack of cost effectiveness were more readily applied in media discourse and debate over nuclear power.

As a means of identifying how media handle challenges to the institutional conventional wisdom, Hallin (1986) describes three concentric circles which inform how media approach political issues. The inner circle, the sphere of consensus, reflects that issue or aspect of an issue which is not under dispute. The sphere of legitimate controversy, the next circle, represents the debate on the issue and the solutions proposed as defined by institutional criteria. The outer circle, the sphere of deviance, represents the issues outside institutional recognition or definition.

From this, we can see public protest or demonstrations will be covered differently depending on which sphere the issue being contested falls. Protest which falls outside the first two spheres will be discounted or ignored. The legitimate

controversy sphere will be the locus from which media judge the viability of protest. Media images of protesters outside this sphere will be more negative than demonstrations dealing with less controversial positions.

The analysis of social protest presented below will focus on the patterns which emerge from the interplay of images of protesters, the issue or focus of the protest and the institutional perspective on the issue. That is, whether protesters challenge the institutional definition of problems and solutions to problems will be a determining factor in how the issues involved in the protest and the images of the protesters are conveyed on television news.

Methodology

Two nine week monitoring periods in 1989 and 1992 were used to compile a total of 238 news stories dealing with social protest. Stories were taken from the three broadcast network news shows in the U.S. (ABC, CBS, NBC). Data from Canadian television news were drawn from CBC's The National, a half hour program similar in format to U.S. nightly news.

Any story which mentioned or covered protest by groups of people (stories about individuals "fighting City Hall" were not included) was included in the sample. There were only a few ambiguous csaes using these criteria. In those cases, the author consulted two other judges to determine whether the story should be included.

While a quantitative content analysis was conducted, this paper will focus on a qualitative analysis leading to the development of a set of frames from which media draw to apply to protesters

in various situations. A second part of the analysis will serve to compare U.S. and Canadian treatment of protest particularly with respect to similarities and differences in how protesters in foreign and domestic protests are portrayed in each country.

For both these goals, a holistic look at protesters was the focus of the analysis-- protesters' appearance and activities, whether they are used for direct quotes in news stories, the length of time given to the protest and the articulation of the protest grievances are all factors addressed in the analysis and frames explicated below.

In general, the data from this sample show Canadian television news runs longer stories on social protest. Canadian news tends to give greater attention to domestic social protest and is more likely to dedicate a whole story to the protest. U.S. network news is far more likely to use domestic protest as a segment of a larger story.

The analysis below will expand on these basic trends. The first part will address a set of recurring images of protesters and their use as sources. The second part will focus on U.S. and Canadian news convergences and divergences in the coverage of social protest.

Framing Protesters: From Legitimating to Demonizing

From the sample of stories described above, five dominant frames were applied in describing protesters and their activities. Each of these is detailed below with reference to indicators of the frame, frequency of portrayal, typical situations in which the frame is applied and other qualities

unique to each frame. It should be noted that these frames are not intended to be mutually exclusive and some protest stories may have two frames which are relevant. The frames defined below present differing views of participants in protest as: 1.) "props" or background (with two subframes-- passive and militant) 2.) confrontational, 3.) empowered/brave, 4.) dehumanized, 5.) articulate.

The first frame involves the use of protesters as props in a story. This frame is broadly applied to many types of protest. It usually appears in stories which briefly refer to, or show, a protest scene. A reporter "stand up" with a picket line in the background or "voice over" with protest scenes is a typical application of the frame. In this frame, protesters voices are not heard or quoted in a sound bite and the story quickly moves from the streets to the suites, where experts define the issue being treated in the news story.

There are two common variations on the prop frame. The passive props are generally found in domestic protest stories. Protesters in this frame are not seen as disruptive, the protest is legal and protesters may be chanting slogans. The second variation in the prop frame is a more militant portrayal of protest. This subframe is found typically in very short stories on foreign protest-- the kind of world headlines segment of a newscast which occurs each night. The militancy of protest is measured by fists in the air, the portrayal of harsh or threatening slogans and signs and generally a distinct tone of anger among the protesters. The militant frame is frequently found in stories of anti- U.S. or anti-West protests.

The confrontational frame usually juxtaposes two opposing entities. It may be protest in which an official is confronted or a situation involving a protest and counter protest. Domestic protest stories on the abortion issue frequently employ this frame. Again, protesters are generally seen and not heard except where two groups may be trying to outshout each other. The frame is applied in foreign stories where police or security forces are seen trying to obstruct or thwart protest action. The confrontational frame may involve physical violence. Incidents between Palestinians and Israelis, scenes from Tienamen Square protests and U.S. anti-war protests are typical news stories where this frame is applied.

The empowerment frame is one of the two positive frames that may be applied to protest. Here, protest is cast as an act of bravery. It is usually applied to foreign news stories where citizens are taking on authoritarian governments. Protesters are seen as standing up to police or making police look powerless by their sheer numbers. Protesters in this frame are more likely to be used as sources within a news story and the story generally has a tone which empathizes with the protesters. This frame generally applies to protest against governments which have an adversarial relationship with the U.S. government. In the 1989 monitoring period, this frame was recurring in protests in Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union, and China during the Tienamen Square protests.

The fourth frame, where protesters are dehumanzied in media coverage, casts protesters as below the norms of civilized

behavior. Verbal and visual cues which typify this frame are: references to protesters as mobs/rioters/violent gangs etc., pictures of people throwing stones, molotov cocktails, looting stores and a general chaotic scene of protest. This frame is frequently found with the props/militant frame in news stories. Participants in protests where these frames are applied are cast as extremists and may be demonized as well as dehumanized. Most of the news stories in which this frame was applied were foreign news stories dealing with civil strife in Tibet, Venezuela, South Africa and South Korea.

The last frame, protesters as articulate, is clearly the most empathetic way of treating protest and protesters. Here, participants in protest are cast as rational, thoughtful and articulate spokespersons for a cause. This is also the frame which was employed the least frequently in protest stories. In this frame, protesters are most likely to be quoted and serve as articulate and authoritative representatives of a position. In most other protest stories, positions are articulated by bureaucratic/expert sources. The protesters in this frame are treated as ordinary and generally have a middle class or otherwise "appropriate" appearance to allow viewers to identify with them. Some of the kinds of stories where this frame is applied were in domestic abortion protest stories, stories on Eastern Europe democratization and, in Canada, stories dealing with the environment and Native rights.

The frames delineated here capture the vast number of stories viewed in this project. While two frames may apply to the same story occasionally, for the most part each story

generally fits one of these frames. Of course, beyond the typology of frames, we need to consider further what circumstances-- media imperatives, cultural/societal factors and political conventional wisdom-- shape the application of some frames in some situations and not in others.

While it may not be possible for a single news story to be constructed in five different ways using each of the frames described above, editorial decision making certainly plays a role in how protest is played or which frame is applied. The current data allow for comparisons of U.S. and Canadian news differences with respect to foreign and domestic protest stories.

U.S. and Canadian News Approaches to Domestic and Foreign Protest

U.S./Foreign

What seems to attract coverage of foreign protest are scenes of conflict and tension. The confrontational frame is frequently found in stories which have an element of violence. Each of the three U.S. broadcast news programs use a world "headlines" segment to convey a host of short (10-15 second) news items. Foreign protest is frequently a part of such short segments.

The primary discriminating factor in what frames are applied to foreign protest is how protest relates to U.S. foreign policy. The application of the frames empowered/brave, confrontational and dehumanized are dependent on whether the protesters' motives are seen as compatible with the lens of U.S government foreign policy. The confrontational and dehumanized frames appear in stories where the protesters' goals conflict with a U.S. or Western orientation to the world. Protests by Arabs/Muslims,

protest against international monetary institutions and anti-West protests generally have negative frames applied to them. On the other hand, protests in Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union and China were more likely to have the empowered/brave or articulate frames applied to the participants. The focus is on rights of civil liberties, free speech and democratic values in empowered/brave and articulate foreign protest frames. However, it should be noted that protesters were used as sources in only 22% of all U.S. network foreign protest stories.

U.S./Domestic

Domestic protest on U.S. networks is most frequently a segment of a larger story. The props frame is a typical device in domestic protest stories. Picket lines, protest rallies are usually backgrounds for reporter "stand-ups" or for transitions in stories. The odd or unusual gimmicks in protest receive media attention and protesters are used as sources one third less than in Canadian domestic protests.

Abortion was a frequent topic in domestic protests. The typical frame for such stories is either the prop or the confrontational frame with the two sides cast in a shouting stand off. In these situations, spokespersons from each side are used to articulate their positions. In many cases, the interview segments are conducted in office settings as opposed to using people on the picket lines.

The empowered frame is rarely applied. If anything, protest is frequently cast as disruptive of democratic processes and, compared to Canadian news, is given short shrift in U.S. newscasts-- protesters are not seen as articulate spokespersons

for a cause.

Canadian/Foreign

Canadian news coverage of foreign protest is similar to U.S. network news coverage. The props/militant, confrontational and empowered/brave frames are the three frames usually applied to foreign protest. Canadian news is more likely to use protesters for direct quotes in a story-- a little more than one third of all stories in Canadian broadcasts used protest participants as sources.

Foreign protests on Canadian news tend to follow or reinforce a Western orientation to the world. The empowered/brave frame was frequently used in stories on the early Tienamen Square protests and in stories on the movement toward democratic government in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. In general, coverage of foreign policy follows the general orientation of U.S. government foreign policy.

Canadian/Domestic

Stories about domestic protest in Canada were the most empathetically treated of all protest stories examined. The articulate and empowered/brave frames frequently recur in a whole host of issues being protested but most prominently in the area of Native rights and the environment. Over seventy percent of all domestic protest stories in Canadian news use protesters as sources.

Protest in Canadian news is seen as part of the democratic process. Opposition to government policies is covered in greater detail than on U.S. network news, especially with respect to

protests against the foreign policies of the U.S. and Canadian governments. Protest is much more likely to be a complete story rather than a brief segment and the use of sources usually serves to create a "debate" between protesters and policy makers.

During the two monitoring periods, several issues dealing with Native rights arose, among them protest at a Canadian/NATO air base over low flyovers and noise and a series of protest/hunger strikes regarding Native access to higher education. While indigenous people were often militant in tone, they were also used as direct sources and had the opportunity to articulate facts and statistics in support of their position.

To sum, the most empathetic images of protest are seen in domestic protests on Canadian news. Foreign protests reflecting U.S./Western interests also are framed in positive ways. Coverage of other forms of protest tend to serve television news values of spectacle or visually oriented conflict. Most protest stories treat protest as a side show or serve as a prop to some larger story. These themes are discussed in further detail below.

Discussion/Conclusions

The interplay between the five types of frames identified in this research and the cross national comparisons generated by looking at two North American media systems reveals patterns and themes in how media approach the coverage of social protest.

By looking at protest in a variety of contexts, it is clear that media use protest imagery to fashion a larger connection to issues of the day. That is, protest is used as a vehicle to legitimate or delegitimate social problems or solutions to

problems.

The stories examined for this project serve to reinforce Hallin's (1986) delineation between legitimate controversy and deviant perspectives. The negative images of protest in news stories tend to correspond to perspectives or issues which fall beyond the institutional boundaries of political discourse. Expert or bureaucratic perspectives are used in the news to define whether or not the protest "goes too far." In other words, media use protest as a line of demarcation between legitimate and deviant political perspectives and policies.

Protest over abortion is an example of how protest within institutional parameters is legitimated. On the other hand, the emotional volitility of the issue gives the cameras conflict imagery. Thus, the abortion issue can employ several frames and while protesters in the streets may reflect the emotion, the news uses institutional representatives of both sides to project the issues of the debate. Because the issue has drawn clear lines among elites and policy makers, both sides are given frequent airing of views.

As an example of protest which falls into the deviant sphere, protests against U.S. policy in Central America were used as a prop with viewers not given a chance to hear articulate criticisms of U.S. behavior in other countries.

In protest stories where more positive frames are applied, protesters are more likely to be used as sources and be cast as empowered and articulate spokespersons exercising democratic civil liberties. While these scenes are far less frequent in

television news, it is noteworthy that not all protests serve the entertainment values approach to television news.

As posited earlier, these differences emerge probably in part due to the institutional ties between the U.S networks and the political and economic establishments. U.S. network news is more focused and reliant on the official world than the everyday world of ordinary people. The star system of U.S. television news creates interpersonal ties between media and political and economic elites while grassroots groups lack the access to receive or influence coverage of issues which matter to them.

The Canadian Broadcasting Company as an independent, public system is not as tied to powerful economic interests and while it covers government extensively, it gives more opportunity to grassroots perspectives. Its foreign news tends to reflect the same U.S./Western orientation found in the U.S. probably as a result of the close correspondence between U.S. and Canadian government foreign policies.

The clearest area of differences in approach between Canadian and U.S. television news coverage of protest is in Canadian news treatment of domestic social protest. Protest stories in Canada are much more readily seen as part of daily politics. Protest is more likely to be a story in itself as opposed to a segment of a story.

The question which remains is what effect does such coverage have on lively or democratic discourse and debate. While protest can be seen as one vehicle of feedback for citizens to their government, the way protest is covered in U.S. television news serves to channel and narrow debate in terms acceptable to the

creators and purveyors of institutional conventional wisdom. Whether the way protest is covered serves to thwart a lively discussion of many perspectives on the news is beyond the scope of this paper. It is often said that media do not tell us what to think but rather what to think about. If true, the way in which deliberation is narrowed to institutional confines clearly serves to focus peoples' thinking on problems and solutions as defined by powerful sectors of society. Marginalized perspectives available through protest are left to whither or are exposed to ridicule by media.

The focus in television news on institutional imperatives runs the risk of alienating sectors left powerless or marginally represented. In the long run, overlooking this feedback function of media in a democratic society may serve to undermine democratic processes and governance.

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NEWS FROM THE NON-INSTITUTIONAL WORLD:

U.S. AND CANADIAN TELEVISION NEWS COVERAGE OF SOCIAL PROTEST

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NEWS FROM THE NON-INSTITUTIONAL WORLD:
U.S. AND CANADIAN TELEVISION NEWS COVERAGE OF SOCIAL PROTEST

Introduction

Images of people protesting have become regular fare on television news. The civil rights movement was born in the same era as television news-- the early 60's. We have seen anti-war, women's and environmental movements all use protest as a means of putting forth alternatives to the official or mainstream approach to the problems which face the U.S. and the world.

More recently, we have seen protest spread to regions and countries of the world where such activity just a few years ago was unthinkable. All this indicates social protest has become a significant tool for citizens and grass roots groups to put forth grievances and opposition to institutional practices and policies.

Coverage of such protests by television news has become a crucial element in how those movements survive, spread or achieve their goals (Gitlin, 1979). Coverage of protest necessitates an eventual response by institutional authorities. (Conversely, lack of coverage or attention to issues makes it easier for authorities to rationalize their policies.) The tactics of protest and the image of protesters conveyed by the news are mediating factors in how the public perceives the protests and the issues involved. As the virtual sole source of news for most people, television news plays a large role in conveying the issues and the viability of issues which are the focus of protests.

The data in this paper will serve to detail and analyze the message system involved in social protests. The term "message system" is meant to convey the relatively coherent world view one can abstract from the news by identifying how stories are framed or put into context and the dominant points of reference used.

The goal of this research is to further an understanding of the ways social protest and social movements are covered by U.S. and Canadian network television news. It is expected there will be patterns and themes in news coverage and variation in the way U.S. and Canadian networks cover social protest.

Specifically, it is expected that Canadian news will rely less on official interpretations and offer more grass roots sources. U.S. network coverage will focus more on the bureaucratic or institutional perspective with the protest serving as a "sideshow." Both countries' news coverage of protest beyond their borders will be dependent on how it affects the foreign policy of each country.

Contextual Factors in Comparing the U.S. and Canada

The use of Canadian and U.S. television news programs provides a basis for comparison and contrast between the two media systems. There are several political and economic reasons why news coverage of domestic and foreign protest should be treated differently in the two countries national television news shows.

Differences in political systems: While both the U.S. and Canada have representative political bodies, Canada's parliamentary system allows for greater multi party

representation and thus a broader political spectrum and debate. The two party system in the U.S. seems to foster a much more narrow centrism (Herman and Chomsky, 1988).

Differences in media financing: By choosing CBC news, a publicly financed entity, we have a contrast in news values. The drive for ratings and financing via advertising in the U.S. shapes the news in at least two ways-- news is thought to need to entertain in order to maintain an audience. The funding mechanism of advertising also creates direct links to financial institutions which seek to maintain the status quo. On the other hand, Canadian news is not as impelled toward entertainment values and with independent governance can take a position more independent of dominant economic institutions.

U.S. role as a superpower: Perhaps the most important factor in reporting on the world is the United States' position as sole superpower in the post Cold War world. While there are similarities between the U.S. and Canadian government policies, there are also important differences. While sharing "Western" values with the U.S., Canada has a more neutral posture in many cases (Canada's relations with Cuba being a significant one). As a superpower, the U.S. government must frequently mobilize the population for support of military action. The events of the 1991 Persian Gulf War make clear how the U.S. media aligned themselves with U.S. policy (Kellner, 1992). Though publicly funded, CBC news seems to make more of an effort to bring a global perspective to its news, reflecting the fact that CBC is modeled after the BBC.

The differences described above should be reflected in

coverage of protest. The broader political mainstream in Canada means protest on many issues will not be as marginalized in Canada as it is in U.S. network news. Greater independence in funding for CBC should lend toward less of an entertainment or spectacle orientation in covering protest movements. Finally, the superpower role of the U.S. necessitates greater public opinion mobilization than in Canada. Thus, contrasting perspectives which challenge the government's foreign policies are less likely to be given full voice in U.S. news in comparison to Canadian news. These differences are further developed in the review of literature on media and protest.

How news treats protest is important in societies which project democratic values and processes and is an aspect of how citizen voices are heard through means other than voting or public opinion reporting. By looking at two countries with representative political systems, we can see how media systems vary in their treatment of ordinary peoples' perspectives.

Review Of Literature

In his seminal work on the relationship between the anti-war movement and the nation's media over the course of the Vietnam war, Gitlin (1980) identified a symbiosis between media and the anti-war protesters.

The media, by and large, covered the movement as spectacle, focusing on the countercultural aspects of the movement. Gitlin says the net effect was to keep the movement marginalized vis a vis larger American society. As the movement grew and came to reflect broader societal representation, the media continued to

focus more on the violent tendencies within the movement. While predominantly nonviolent, the movement's need for media to spread its message and expand its base and the media's use of the movement to provide conflict and tension created an escalation of tactics by some within that movement to maintain attention. Ongoing, peaceful protest, from the media's viewpoint, was an "old story." Conflict and violence, especially for television cameras, was a means of maintaining attention.

Gitlin says this situation created a routinization of coverage by creating frames or "persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation and presentation of selective emphasis and exclusion by which symbol handlers routinely organize discourse" (1980, p. 7). Gitlin concludes these media conventions encouraged the same extremists they deplored.

Likewise, Hallin (1986) identifies anti-war protest as something the media did not ignore but rather covered to suit their needs. He says media generally place a low value on citizen involvement. The overwhelming focus of media attention is on institutional or establishment perspectives. Specifically, he notes that though CBS coverage of the Vietnam war in 1966 gave 20% of its attention to the domestic controversy over Vietnam, protesters never acquired anything remotely resembling the opportunity officials had to clearly articulate their positions. Later in the war (1968 onward), negative statements about protesters outweighed positive assessments by a 2 to 1 margin.

The sources used by media further reflect the media's reliance on institutional or establishment figures-- 49% of all domestic critics of the war were public or former public

officials. Another 16% came from media commentaries or interpretive reports and the remaining 35% were composed of all others-- protesters, soldiers or other citizens.

For Hallin (1986), another important consideration in how media cover protest is the issue involved. He describes three concentric circles which inform how media approach political issues. The inner circle, the sphere of consensus, reflects that issue or aspect of an issue which is not under dispute. The sphere of legitimate controversy, the next circle, represents the debate on the issue and the solutions proposed, as defined by institutional criteria. The outer circle, the sphere of deviance represents the issues outside institutional recognition or definition.

From this, we can see public protest or demonstrations will be covered differently depending on which sphere the issue being contested falls. Protest which falls outside the first two spheres will be discounted or ignored. The legitimate controversy sphere will be the locus from which media judge the viability of protest. Images projected by media of protesters outside this sphere will be more negative than demonstrations dealing with less controversial positions.

An example of the concept of bounded discourse can be found in Gamson and Modigliani's (1989) analysis of nuclear power issues. They found that the media tend to ignore protest perspectives and move to more established critics. Competing models for the definition of the problem play a key role. For example, the alternative energy ("soft paths") perspective was

not cast as a viable alternative to nuclear power because it was a direct challenge to energy interests. The more mainstream critiques of public accountability of the nuclear industry and nuclear power's lack of cost effectiveness were more readily applied in media discourse and debate over nuclear power.

In the most general sense, Hilgartner and Bosk (1988) point out that a social problem's rise and fall from the public agenda is less dependent on an objective worsening or amelioration of the problem than on a critical mass coming to see the problem as such. That is, attention to a problem is a process of collective definition. At any given point, competing views of a problem and competition among the general range of social problems are factors in how the media treat any one problem. "Sponsors" of a problem are seen to have a large role in the success of getting on the public agenda. If elites latch onto a problem for their own purposes, it will receive greater attention. Conversely, Hilgartner and Bosk maintain that if some solutions to problems go outside elite circles, a politically enforced neglect will obtain.

Thus, it is clear that the institutional definition of problems and the range of proposed solutions to problems are largely accepted and preferred by media. As second issue to consider beyond the framing of the issues is the framing of those involved in protest. An audience's ability to identify with protesters is a key in that protest's effectiveness among the general population.

Shoemaker's (1982) experiments in the definition of deviant political groups affirmed that the more closely a group's

concerns reflect elite concerns, the more likely they are incorporated within a prevailing news frame. Further, U.S. media support "centrist" political groupings by delegitimizing deviant political groups. In framing deviant groups as ridiculous and eccentric, they are cast as less legitimate.

Similarly, Wolfsfeld (1984) identifies a competitive symbiosis between the press and protest movements where each relies on the other to meet their individual goals. Wolfsfeld maintains protest leaders are most interested in persuading others while media use sensation to frame protest stories and make them "interesting." The net result is a tendency to concentrate on fringe elements as media pick the news peg which has most relevance for their needs.

Jensen's (1987) study of media discourse looked at two protests-- one against a nuclear power plant and the other the 1981 Labor Solidarity march of union and working people. Coverage of the nuclear protest addressed the cost of security and the role of police in protecting the plant. Jensen maintains such a focus contains an unspoken presupposition about protesters' proclivity for violence. Other images conveyed also emphasized the spectacle of protest-- a "party" atmosphere and a lack of articulation of protesters' goals and beliefs.

These presentations of protest and images of protesters conveyed serve to reinforce the dominant frames used in the Vietnam era protests. Media almost assuredly will do two things when covering protests-- evoke images of the 60's movements and discuss whether the protesters (as opposed to the police) were

peaceful or violent.

It is important to put research on protest into a larger context. Below are the premises which guide the data gathered for the current project:

1. The U.S. television networks are fully integrated into the dominant institutional structures of society, especially the economic and political institutions. (Bagdikian, 1987; Herman and Chomsky, 1988; Defleur and Ball-Rokeach, 1987)

2. The most frequently consulted sources come from these institutions (DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach, 1987; Hoynes and Croteau, 1989; Soley, 1989). These sources by and large serve to flavor or "spin" the news in a manner which usually does not question the established order or status quo.

3. Debate on any issue is by and large contained within the boundaries of institutional frameworks (Hallin, 1986; Gamson, 1989; Hilgartner and Bosk, 1988). The degree of dissonance within governmental/institutional elites can give rise to coverage of social protest and a greater degree of debate.

For example, the ongoing debate over abortion has both sides receiving a wide array of coverage. On the other hand, institutional debate and media coverage of Central America policy never precluded the U.S.'s natural right to intervene in the region and it was that issue which was the focus of protest.

4. On foreign policy issues, the degree of sympathy accorded to protesters will be dependent on the U.S. or Canadian government's relationship to the foreign government. For example, during the Tienamen square protest in China, similar worker and student protests in South Korea were scarcely covered

while the Tienamen coverage saturated the airwaves.

5. As discussed earlier, differences between the U.S. and Canada with regard to their political/electoral system, financing mechanisms for television news, and role in world affairs will be reflected in how each country's television news covers social protest.

This content analysis will test three general hypotheses regarding the nature of media coverage of social protest:

1. News will tend to portray social protest as spectacle rather than as issue/citizen action or participation in policy formation.

2. U.S. network news will give less attention to protest perspectives than Canadian news.

3. Coverage of foreign protests will by and large follow the U.S. foreign policy perspective. Protests against friendly governments will be portrayed more negatively than protests against unfriendly (or less friendly) countries. This trend will be demonstrated most clearly in U.S. news reports but should also be reflected in Canadian network news, given the shared "Western" orientation to the world.

Methodology

Most of the previous studies discussed above were qualitative analyses and tend to focus on single movements or issues. The quantitative data reported in this paper will add to the body of knowledge by looking at ongoing news coverage of protest across a range of issues and situations. In this period of history, the data will be enriched by an ability to look at

protest in unfriendly countries. Given the media's reliance on institutional sources (in this case, the U.S. government), it can be hypothesized that media coverage of anti-government protest movements will be more favorable in those countries whose governments do not have good relations with the U.S. government.

This project collected and analyzed data from two data collection periods in February-April of 1989 and 1992. There were some differences in the kinds of protest stories covered, largely due to historical events taking place during each period. These differences will be addressed shortly.

Each of the 238 stories selected from these sampling periods were included on the basis of a distinct portrayal or reference to, however brief, of an obvious protest scene. In anchor read stories, a reference to protest served as criteria for inclusion.

The primary researcher coded each of these stories. Among the variables measured were: length of story, whether protest was a segment or complete story, the general image portrayed of protest "actors" (protesters, targets or counter protesters, police, when portrayed, etc.). For foreign stories, a country's relationship with the U.S. at that time was coded on a three point scale.

Given the judgments involved, an intercoder reliability study was performed to validate the data and test for any personal bias of the researcher, especially with respect to the judgment variables used to asses the tone of the story. This study resulted in a acceptable degree of reliability of the measures. On categorical or less subjective variables such as story type, location, source types etc.), the range of values

using Scott's pi (1955) was .86-.92. For the more subjective variables or those requiring assessment of images (image conveyed of protesters, targets and police), the reliability scores ranged from .81-.83. The results of these tests indicate a high degree of agreement between judges and thus bring reliability to the results discussed below.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The data presented here will focus primarily on comparisons and contrasts in U.S. and Canadian news treatment of protest. Although each of the three U.S. broadcast networks were part of the sample, the data indicate there is great similarity among the three and thus we will not get into the nuances, whether rhetorical or structural, of differences in the way each U.S. network presents its evening news program. In fact, the **similarities** in stories covered are remarkable. In 1989, CBS had 33 stories relevant to our concerns while NBC and ABC each had one more, 34. From the 1992 data, each US network had 18 stories dealing with social protest. The number of stories for CBC in 1989 and 1992 were 53 and 30 respectively. Accounting for the number of news programs taken from each network, the differences in number of stories concerning social protest were negligible between U.S. and Canadian news. The average number of protest stories per newscast was 1.12 for the U.S. networks and 1.17 for the CBC in 1989. For 1992, the comparable figures are .60 for the U.S. networks and .66 for the CBC.

Differences between the 1989 and 1992 data are also found in the length of stories. For each network, 1992 stories were

substantially longer than 1989 stories (see Table 1). This appears not to be a conscious trend on the part of the network news producers but is perhaps due to fewer world crises demanding news space. This is illustrated by differences in coverage of the following countries/regions: Israel/Palestine, Central America, E. Europe, Soviet Union and China accounted for 67 more foreign protest stories in 1989 than in 1992. That this equals the exact difference as shown in Table 2 is merely coincidence but nonetheless the point remains that the large number of upheavals present in the news of the late 1980's played a large role in the decline of foreign stories dealing with social protest in the 1992 sample.

Table 1 about here

Table 2 also shows a shift in percentage breakdown in domestic and foreign protest stories for 1989 and 1992. For both networks, there was a greater percentage of foreign protest stories in 1989, especially for the U.S. networks (8% swing for the CBC, 26% for the U.S. networks). Taken together, Tables 1 and 2 illustrate the changes between the two periods of time sampled for this project.

Table 2 about here

Tables 3 and 4 add more information as to how much time was devoted to foreign and domestic protests. Table 3 looks at

whether social protest was the focus of a complete story or whether protest comprised a segment of a story. As Table 3 illustrates, domestic U.S. protest is most frequently a part of a story about the larger issues involved while CBC reports on domestic protest often were the subject of an entire story. These data suggest that U.S. network news treats protest as a sideshow or, at best, a spectacle.

Finally, Tables 3 and 4 show foreign protest stories are covered as complete stories but many of these stories are under one minute. That is, they are likely to be part of a series of short reports which serve as a "world headlines segment" of network news broadcasts.

Tables 3 and 4 about here

Domestic Stories

Table 5 details the topics of domestic stories on the CBC and the U.S. networks. There is some degree of convergence between U.S. and Canadian television news with respect to the kinds of domestic protest are covered, but as we might expect, there are more differences between the two countries as a result of different domestic agendas. Abortion protests on both sides are heavily covered and protest about the environment receives some attention as well. Domestic protest in the U.S. also included racial tension, gun control, free speech/censorship and economic issues (taxes/buy American/health care). Canadian news

focused on the Quebec/distinct society debate, fishing disputes between Canadian and international fishing fleets and native rights. The most outstanding difference is in the area of domestic protests about the U.S. or Canadian government's foreign policy. CBC seems to be more likely to cover these protests than U.S. networks. Protests in Canada about Eastern Europe, South Africa and Israel outnumbered protests in the U.S. about Central America and Israel.

Table 5 about here

Foreign Stories

Table 6 gives an overview of where the foreign protest stories took place. The U.S. networks and the CBC gave roughly the same emphasis to different parts of the world. Stories on protests in the Mideast were frequent with the U.S. networks focusing on countries other than Israel while the CBC had more stories on protests within Israel and the territory it controls. Beyond the Mideast and Europe, only China (Tienamen Square) and South Africa received much ongoing attention.

This suggests that the news in both countries seems to follow the agendas and concerns of the western powers. This of course does not necessarily indicate a bias in perspective. Table 7 shows a distribution of foreign protest stories based on a country's relationship with the U.S. government. Countries where foreign protests took place were coded on a three point

scale in terms of thier relationship to the U.S (1=ally, 3=adversary). In using U.S. foreign policy as a barometer, we are basically acknowledging the great similarity between the U.S. and Canadian governments' perspective on the world. There are some nuances (Canada, for example, has relations with Cuba) but for the most part, the two governments have the same allies and adversaries.

The table shows there is an even distribution of foreign stories by both the CBC and the U.S. networks with respect to the relationship a foreign country has with the United States. Given this balance of foreign protests, we might assume that U.S. and Canadian news are likely to report critically on "friendly" foreign governments in the same fashion as they report on adversary foreign governments. However, just providing coverage of foreign protest does not necessarily mean taking a critical view of the targeted government. Rather, coverage may have a sympathetic spin toward a targeted government. Thus, we must look at the way the protest is presented to television news audiences.

The way in which either countries' television news media "spin" the news was measured on the basis of the visual images presented and the general verbal tone of the story with respect to protesters, their targets of protest and, when relevant, how the police or other forces are portrayed in the story. Tables 8, 9 and 10 provide the data used to measure the differences in image conveyed with respect to protest in allied and adversary countries.

The general hypothesis being tested here is that the tone of coverage will reflect the U.S./Canadian foreign policy perspective. Thus, protests against adversary governments will be portrayed more positively than protests in friendly or allied countries.

Table 8 looks at how the U.S. networks and the CBC portrayed protesters in foreign countries. Using a five point scale (1= positive, 5=negative), the general image of protesters varied significantly with respect to the political distance of a country from the U.S./Canadian governments. Table 8 shows that protesters in adversarial countries were portrayed more positively than protesters in friendly countries. Although the range of variation was greater for the U.S. networks than for the CBC, the differences between the CBC and the U.S. networks were not significant.

Table 8 about here

Table 9 presents data on the images of protest targets in foreign protest stories. Most, but not all, of the time the targets of foreign protests were the governments in the countries where the protest took place. Given the hypothesis discussed above and the findings in Table 8, we expect that the images of the targets of protest will be more negative in adversary governments than friendly countries. The data in Table 9 give support to that perspective. For both the U.S. and the CBC networks, the images of adversary governments are significantly more negative than the

images of friendly governments. This time the range of mean scores is wider for the CBC than the U.S. networks but again there was no statistically significant difference between the U.S. and Canadian news treatment of protest targets.

Table 10 presents data on the images of police in foreign protest stories. For many stories, police or similar authorities were not present in the story, so the data get a little thin (note the low N's especially for the CBC). Nonetheless, the relationships in this table are consistent with the results presented in Tables 8 and 9 above. In the case of both the CBC and the U.S. networks, there is a "dip" in the middle of the scale but police in adversary countries are portrayed more negatively than police in friendly countries.

In general, the data dealing with the portrayal of protesters, targets of protest and police are consistent with the previous research and the theoretical framework presented earlier. The Eta values in each table, as a measure of the strength of a relationship, range from significant but weak (.105) in Table 7 to signficant and moderate (.240) in Table 8. As hypothesized earlier, television news coverage tends to reflect the perspective of U.S. government foreign policy. Thus, while news media in the U.S. are formally independent of the government, there are many contributing factors in why media project and reflect benevolent attitudes toward the role the U.S. plays in the world.

Discussion

The presentation of the data above allow for several meaningful conclusions. By and large, the hypotheses are supported by the data. The institutional focus of network television news puts protest news in the category of odd, spectacle oriented news. Protesters are generally not portrayed in a way which reflects a sense of political efficacy.

A focus on the quirky or odd nature of protest relegates it to amusement or ridicule. At best, protest scenes are usually the backdrop or "props" for introducing a debate which reflects elite, as opposed to grass roots, perspectives.

Both U.S. and Canadian news offer similar views of protesters with one exception. CBC seems to take a more serious tone to domestic protests. Domestic protest stories are far more likely to be a complete story in Canadian newscasts while domestic protest on U.S. networks are more frequently a segment of a story which gives more play to elite perspectives.

Canadian news also seems give greater coverage of domestic protests over Canadian government foreign policy than U.S. news gives to protest against U.S. foreign policy.

In total, the findings suggest that U.S. news is far more institutionally focused and guided. As discussed earlier, Hallin's (1986) differentiation between the spheres of legitimate controversy and the sphere of deviance holds relevance for how U.S. news media approach social protest. In the domestic arena, using social protest as a prop or backdrop to a story frequently downplays the issues raised by the protesters and elevates the boundaries of debate as defined by institutional elites. In

terms of foreign protest, those protesters are either good guys (brave, efficacious, truthful) or bad guys (hostile, violent, anti-U.S.) depending on the U.S. government's foreign policy in the situation.

In light of these consistent images of protest, the next essential question is the impact on political debate and discussion. In a democratic system, citizen feedback to elected representatives is a necessary component of contentment with the political system. The data from this project suggest that media are less responsive to grass roots perspectives in the form of social protest. How feedback to the political system is mediated in news coverage is an area for further exploration and research. With its institutional focus, television news seems to serve more to channel or restrict alternatives than to create a lively political dialogue.

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Table 1. Length of social protest stories for U.S. and Canadian Networks in 1989 and 1992.

Network	Mean length of stories (in seconds)	
	1989	1992
ABC	80.11	125.00
CBS	95.48	140.83
NBC	105.58	120.66
CBC	109.15	128.83

Table 2. Foreign and Domestic Social Protest Stories by U.S. and Canadian Networks in 1989 and 1992

Country	Domestic						Foreign					
	'89		'92		Total		'89		'92		Total	
	%	(N)	%	(N)	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
US	20	(20)	46	(25)	29	(45)	80	(81)	54	(29)	71	(110)
CAN	44	(24)	53	(16)	48	(40)	56	(29)	47	(14)	52	(43)

Table 3. Coverage of Social Protest as a Story Segment or Complete Story

Country	Domestic				Foreign			
	Complete		Segment		Complete		Segment	
	%	(N)	%	(N)	%	N	%	N
US	20	(9)	80	(36)	51	(56)	49	(54)
CAN	43	(17)	57	(23)	49	(21)	51	(22)

Table 4. Length of Social Protest Stories by Network and Story Locale.

Country	Domestic				Foreign			
	Under 1 min.		Over 1 min.		Under 1 min.		Over 1 min.	
	%	(N)	%	(N)	%	N	%	N
US	9	(4)	91	(41)	36	(40)	64	(70)
CAN	15	(6)	85	(34)	37	(16)	63	(27)

Table 5. Domestic Protest Story Topics by Network

Domestic Topic	US Networks (in percent)	Canada
Abortion	28.9	17.5
Foreign Policy issues	6.7	22.5
Environment	6.7	10.0
Internat'l Fishing dispute		10.0
Racial tension/hate crime	8.9	
Meech Lake/Quebec		5.0
Native Rights		5.0
Taxes	4.4	5.0
AIDS	2.2	2.5
Gun Control	6.7	
Free Speech/Art	4.4	2.5
Abbie Hoffman obit	4.4	2.5
Environment		2.5
Buy American	4.4	
Health Care	2.2	
Canada Other		15.0
US Other	15.7	

Table 6. Location of Foreign Protest Stories by Network

Country	US Networks (in percent)	Canada
Israel	15.5	22.0
Other Mideast	11.7	4.8
W. Europe	9.9	4.8
E. Europe	10.0	17.0
Soviet Union	13.6	9.8
South Africa	8.2	9.7
China	17.3	22.0
Central America	2.7	2.4
South America	7.2	4.9
South Korea	2.7	
Australia	.9	
Canada Foreign		2.4

Table 7. Coverage of Foreign Protest by Country's Relation to United States

Network	Ally 1		2		Adversary 3	
	%	(N)	%	(N)	%	(N)
US Networks	35	(38)	31	(34)	34	(37)
CBC	34	(14)	32	(13)	34	(14)

Table 8. Images of Protesters in Foreign Protest Stories by Country's Relation to United States

Network	Ally 1		2		Adversary 3	
	Mean	(N)	Mean	(N)	Mean	(N)
US Networks	2.8	(38)	2.3	(34)	2.0	(37)
CBC	2.5	(14)	2.1	(13)	2.1	(14)

F= 8.465 Sig.=.0003 Eta Squared= .105

Table 9. Images of Protest Targets in Foreign Protest Stories by Country's Relation to United States

Network	Ally 1		2		Adversary 3	
	Mean	(N)	Mean	(N)	Mean	(N)
US Networks	2.88	(34)	3.42	(33)	3.51	(35)
CBC	2.71	(14)	3.3	(13)	3.69	(13)

F= 14.80 Sig.=.0000 Eta Squared= .242

Table 10. Images of Police in Foreign Protest Stories by Country's Relation to United States

Network	Ally 1		2		Adversary 3	
	Mean	(N)	Mean	(N)	Mean	(N)
US Networks	3.41	(17)	3.31	(16)	4.00	(16)
CBC	3.42	(7)	3.28	(7)	4.50	(4)

F= 5.145 Sig.=.008 Eta Squared= .138

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Do Televised Depictions of Paranormal Events Influence Viewers' Paranormal Beliefs?

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Running Head: TELEVISED DEPICTIONS OF PARANORMAL EVENTS

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The authors are grateful for the able assistance of Prof. Eran Preis and Kelly Hodgson in assisting with the experimental procedures reported in this study. This study was partially supported by a Faculty Incentive Grant awarded to the first author by the School of Liberal Arts at Purdue University, 1991. The paper was competitively selected for presentation to the Mass Communication and Society Division of the AEJMC at the annual meeting in Kansas City, August, 1993.

Abstract

Recent surveys indicate that belief in paranormal events is widespread among Americans. Over the last decade, a number of scientists and skeptics have bemoaned this fact and charged that the media are largely to blame for influencing the public to endorse the veracity of paranormal claims. Interestingly, however, these same scientists, who insist on rigorous empirical tests of paranormal phenomena, have shown little interest in gathering empirical support for their major charge that the media exert a pernicious influence on people's tendency to uncritically accept paranormal events as true. This study reports an experiment that was designed to investigate on the question of media influence on paranormal beliefs. Different versions of prior information about the veracity of a parnormal depiction were presented just prior to viewing an episode of Beyond Reality, a program that regularly depicts paranormal events. The results revealed that the presentation of a disclaimer before the program significantly reduced the tendency to endorse paranormal beliefs, while the presentation of a disclaimer-free program had the opposite effect. Implications and suggestions for future study in this area are discussed.

"Truth, whether in or out of fashion, is the measure of knowledge, and the business of the understanding; whatsoever is beside that, however authorized by consent, or recommended by rarity, is nothing but ignorance, or something worse." -John Locke

Over the last fifteen years, scholars from various disciplines have shown increasing interest in the study of paranormal beliefs. The term "paranormal" is reserved for claims made about the existence of a wide range of extraordinary phenomena that include such things as ESP, (extrasensory perception), haunted houses, ghosts, devils, spirits, reincarnation, telekinesis (the ability of the mind to move or bend objects just by thinking), UFOs (unidentified flying objects), astrology, and astral-projection (one's spirit leaving the body, traveling some distance, and then returning). In a recent national survey of 1,236 adults, Gallup and Newport (1991) reported that paranormal beliefs were "widespread," with nearly 50% of the respondents reporting belief in ESP and almost 30% reporting belief in haunted houses. These beliefs are held by people of various demographic groups, occupations and economic levels. As Donald Regan, chief of staff for President Ronald Reagan, recently revealed, paranormal beliefs played a regular role in the affairs of the U.S. government. Regan (1988) reported that the President and his wife, Nancy, regularly relied on the advice of a San Francisco astrologer (Joan Quigley) prior to planning important events. Such behavior is not unusual among politicians; Korem (1988) documents other instances throughout human

history where world leaders have relied upon the advice of astrologers and psychics.

Scholars have shown interest in the study of paranormal beliefs for different reasons. In noting that such study, "has assumed psychological importance," Grimmer and White (1991) (also see Russell & Jones, 1980) pointed out that "...the persistence of such beliefs, despite major advances in scientific study and education, attests to their functionality in satisfying some basic psychological needs" (p. 358). In order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the precise psychological role that paranormal beliefs might play for some individuals, psychologists have focused much of their effort toward constructing reliable and valid measures of these beliefs (Blum & Blum, 1974; Jones, Russell, & Nickel, 1977; Killen, Wildman, & Wildman, 1974; Randall & Desrosiers, 1980; Scheidt, 1973; Tobacyk & Milford, 1983). Such measures have been used in several studies that have attempted to document the prevalence of paranormal beliefs among a variety of different demographic groups (Blum & Blum, 1974; Emme, 1940; Evans, 1973; Grimmer & White, 1990; Killen, Wildman, & Wildman, 1974; Randall & Desrosiers, 1980; Tobacyk, Miller, Murphy, & Mitchell, 1988; Williams, Taylor, & Hintze, 1989). While some psychologists (Tobacyk & Milford, 1983) have suggested that paranormal beliefs have psychological significance because of their relationship to personality variables (e.g., locus of control, dogmatism, self-concept, irrational beliefs, etc.), research on this point is lacking and would appear to be the major direction of future psychological studies.

In addition to research on the psychological significance of paranormal beliefs, a number of scholars and skeptics from different disciplines and intellectual perspectives have expressed concern about the fact that belief in the paranormal is so widespread. For example, Feder (1984), an anthropologist writing in American Antiquity, laments the findings of a survey reported by Bainbridge (1978) that revealed widespread acceptance of the notion that, "human physical and cultural evolution was directed by extraterrestrial aliens" (pp. 525-26). Regarding these findings, Bainbridge concluded that, "Apparently our university does not give students the knowledge to protect them from intellectual fraud" (p. 39). Upon reflecting on this state of affairs in archaeology, Feder (1984) challenged his colleague teachers by urging them to,

> ...respond rationally to the irrationality that dogs our discipline...if we allow fantasies of the past to be presented as fact with no response, we become accessories in the misinformation and miseducation of our students and the public at large...If we abrogate this responsibility...we must surely share in the blame along with the purveyors of pseudoscience.

The popular press has also given recent attention to the potential danger of widespread belief in paranormal claims. In a guest essay for Time (April 13, 1992), James Randi, a magician and skeptic, wrote:

> Acceptance of nonsense as a harmless aberration can be dangerous to us. We live in a society that is enlarging the boundaries of knowledge at an unprecedented rate, and

> we cannot keep up with much more than a small portion of what is made available to us. To mix our data input with childish notions of magic and fantasy is to cripple our perception of the world around us. We must reach for the truth, not for the ghosts of dead absurdities. (p. 80)

Several years ago, the concern among scientific skeptics for the widespread acceptance of various paranormal claims led to the formation of the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP). This organization launched the journal, The Skeptical Inquirer, which has regularly served as a watchdog and debunker of paranormal claims for more than a decade. According to Kurtz (1985), the purpose of this journal is to reveal the many "wishful" and "exaggerated" claims frequently made about paranormal events and to provide the public with the opportunity, "to learn about dissenting scientific studies..." (p. 357).

The Alleged Role of the Mass Media in Fostering Paranormal Beliefs

It is evident from the literature discussed to this point that scholars have taken up the study of paranormal beliefs for very different purposes. However, one assumption or claim that consistently appears across all of the literature dealing with paranormal beliefs is that *the mass media should accept a major responsibility for encouraging people toward uncritical acceptance of paranormal claims*. For example, Randi (1992) noted in his essay that the reason for the prevalence of "absurd beliefs" among the populaces of every culture, "...is to be found in the uncritical acceptance and promotion of these notions by the media..." (p. 80).

Among those with more scholarly credentials, the indictment of the media for encouraging the adoption of paranormal beliefs is far harsher than Randi's. Even a casual perusal through the literature reveals that its scholarly contributors subscribe widely to the notion that the media unduly influence people to accept paranormal claims by giving excessive attention to reports of paranormal activity, and by encouraging uncritical acceptance of the veracity of these reports (Feder, 1984; Kurtz, 1985). For example, Kurtz (1985) refers to the, "dominant influence of the media in forming [paranormal] attitudes and beliefs," and he charges that the media often, "behave totally irresponsibly in treating 'paranormal' occurrences" (pp. 359-360). Along this same line, Feder (1984) blames the media for the problems faced by archaeologists in their attempts to overcome the many reports of, "unverified claims."

The assumption that the media play a crucial role in influencing these paranormal beliefs is not new (see Maller & Lundeen, 1932), but it appears to have become more prevalent since the rise of television. In support of the notion that today's media do influence the tendency to accept paranormal claims, some surveys have found that respondents often cite stories in the media as the reason for their beliefs (Alcock, 1981; Evans, 1973). And according to CSICOP (B. Karr, personal communication, April, 1993), at least fifty newspapers, including The Los Angeles Times and The Indianapolis Star publish disclaimers next to the daily horoscope column (also see Gersh, 1987). Presumably these disclaimers are intended to discourage readers from believing in the accuracy of the astrological predictions.

Surprisingly, despite the widespread assumption that media depictions of the paranormal influence people to believe in paranormal phenomena, there appears to be no direct empirical evidence to substantiate this claim. This is particularly interesting in light of the fact that the scientists, philosophers and skeptics, who often blame the media for disseminating scientifically unproven ideas about the paranormal, simultaneously appear to be relatively unconcerned about offering scientific evidence for their own claim of the pernicious effects of the media in this domain. Because there is little or no evidence about the potential for media depictions of the paranormal to influence paranormal beliefs, the study reported below investigated this issue.

Disclaimers and Truth Claims in Media Depictions of the Paranormal

As noted above, some newspapers carry disclaimers next to astrology columns that inform the public that the astrological predictions have no scientific validity. But this practice does not appear to be widespread. More common than the use of disclaimers is the use of truth claims that inform the public that media depictions of paranormal activity are actually based on documented occurrences. Such truth claims are used frequently in news documentaries to substantiate the fact that the depicted events actually happened. Several recent TV programs (e.g., Unsolved Mysteries, Haunted Houses: Real Stories) follow this news documentary style. While research on the effects of paranormal truth claims presented in a news documentary is important, the present study is concerned with

the use of disclaimers and truth claims for paranormal events that occur in the context of dramatic entertainment.[1]

One recent television series that regularly features the dramatic depiction of paranormal events is Beyond Reality (USA Network). This 30-minute program begins with a short truth claim: "The following story of parnormal activity is based on reported incidents." Each episode in the series depicts the story of one primary character's experience with some type of paranormal event, which is always depicted as if it actually happened. The program features the same major characters in each episode, who portray professional investigators of paranormal events. One question that arises regarding this program concerns the potential effects of the information that is presented prior to each episode. Does the truth claim that appears before each episode lend more credibility to the program content and influence people to believe more in the validity of paranormal events? How does the effect of this truth claim differ from the effect of other types of information (i.e., disclaimers) that might appear in the same place---or from no information at all? These questions were explored in the experiment reported below.

Theoretical Considerations on the Effects of Prior Information

Since few, if any, studies address the above questions, there is little prior theory to draw upon in formulating expectations for the present investigation. One of the most important considerations to note about the situation addressed in this study is that viewers of typical television entertainment fare are not, generally, motivated to engage in careful, elaborated, rational deliberation on

the various points that might be used to support or refute the validity of paranormal activity. Rather, their viewing orientation is more likely to be directed toward satisfying some emotional need (Rubin, 1986) or toward affecting their current mood (Zillmann, 1988). The inclusion of either a truth claim or a disclaimer prior to an episode of dramatic entertainment should generally increase the viewer's motivation to evaluate the veracity of the depicted events. One question addressed by the present research concerns the effects of a televised, dramatic depiction of paranormal activity that occurs in the absence of any disclaimer or truth claim, and is consequently seen by viewers who are relatively unmotivated to make judgments about the veracity of the program content.[2]

Of course, there is an entire tradition of research in media cultivation to suggest that exposure to standard, dramatic entertainment programming can cultivate viewers' beliefs about the nature and frequency of the depicted events in the real world (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1986; Ogles, 1987). While the specific cognitive mechanisms that may be responsible for cultivation effects are not well understood (see Hawkins, Pingree, & Adler, 1987), some have suggested (Ogles & Hoffner, 1987) that as viewers make judgments about the real world, they tend to rely upon media images that are readily available in memory due to heavy or recent exposure to TV entertainment (see Tversky & Kahneman, 1973 for a discussion of the availability heuristic). According to this general view, it seems reasonable to expect that the typical viewer, who is unmotivated to think about the veracity of a paranormal depiction in a dramatic TV program, might draw upon such

a depiction when asked to make a judgment about the veracity of a paranormal event in the real world. In order to test this notion, the experiment reported below included one condition in which participants watched an episode of Beyond Reality that did not include the usual truth claim that always accompanies the program when it is broadcast. It seemed possible that viewers in this condition might rely upon recently presented information in the program and increase their tendency to express belief in the paranormal.

A truth claim or a disclaimer presented prior to a televised depiction of a paranormal event might be expected to influence viewers in the direction of the information presented. If a disclaimer denies the veracity of the events to be depicted, viewers must confront the notion that the depicted events are completely fictitious--despite the fact that they seem convincing in the context of the program. This may lead viewers to be more suspicious of paranormal activity when given the opportunity to endorse various paranormal beliefs. Conversely, a truth claim may enhance the credibility of the dramatic presentation and increase the tendency for viewers to endorse beliefs in the paranormal following the program. However, there is another possibility. Relative to the viewers who receive no information prior the program, the inclusion of a truth claim may serve to motivate viewers to think about the veracity of the depicted events. This increased thought may not necessarily result in increased paranormal beliefs. In fact, such beliefs may actually decline if viewers who are motivated to

evaluate the program discover certain aspects of the content to be suspicious, difficult to accept, or impossible to substantiate.

Given the lack of prior research and theory on this topic, and the alternative possibilities suggested in the above analysis, the study reported below was designed to answer a research question rather than test formal theoretical hypotheses:

> RQ1: Does the presentation of a truth claim or a disclaimer prior to a televised drama which depicts paranormal activity, affect the tendency of viewers to express belief or disbelief in paranormal events?

METHOD

Participants

Students enrolled in a Communication class at a large midwestern university served as participants in the study (N = 187; males: n = 56, females: n = 131).[3] Participation in the study was offered as one alternative for discharging a course research requirement.

Design

In a single-factor experiment, participants were randomly assigned to one of five experimental conditions. In four of the conditions, everyone watched the same episode of Beyond Reality, but the information that appeared prior to the episode was varied. In a fifth condition (control group), participants viewed an episode of a situation comedy that contained no references to paranormal activity.

Equipment

The television program was played on a Panasonic Omnivision, VHS-format VCR (model #PV-4114). The program was viewed on a Sharp, 25" color monitor (model #25MT17) at a distance of 5-feet.

Procedure

The initial phase of the study called for potential participants to complete a preliminary questionnaire during class. This questionnaire contained thirty items that were designed to measure the extent to which a respondent expressed belief in paranormal activity. In order to disguise the true purpose of the experiment, the questionnaire also contained ten items taken from the Affect Intensity Measure (AIM, Larsen, Diener, & Emmons, 1986). In addition, respondents were requested to indicate how frequently they engaged in a variety of activities during a typical month. These questions were also included to disguise the purpose of the investigation.

Over the two-week period following completion of the initial questionnaire, participants signed up for the laboratory phase of the investigation. Following the two-week sign-up period, participants reported to the laboratory at their assigned time. Participants were run through the laboratory phase of the study in groups that ranged in size from two to five. Upon arriving at the laboratory, participants were instructed to sit in one of five desks that were separated by visual barriers, in order to prevent any interaction during the session. Each participant read and signed an informed consent statement, which explained that the investigators

were interested in their reactions to different types of media content. Participants were instructed to relax and enjoy the television program and the commercials that they were about to see, but to be sure not to interact with each other during the program. Commercials were mentioned in an attempt to disguise the true purpose of the experiment. Observations through a one-way window indicated that no interaction took place between any of the participants.

During each viewing session, participants watched one of five different video-tapes which had been randomly assigned to the various viewing sessions prior to the arrival of the participants. In four of the conditions, participants viewed a 30-minute episode of the program, Beyond Reality, including the commercial messages as they were originally broadcast. The only difference between these four conditions was the message that was professionally edited at the beginning of the program to convey various impressions of the upcoming program. The messages appeared in white letters on a dark background and the same narrator's voice read each message. These messages were edited into the same place where the actual "truth claim" originally appeared when the episode was broadcast. After the final data collection, participants were asked about their perceptions of the edited messages. No one expressed suspicion that the messages were not actually part of the program as it had been originally broadcast. The different messages were as follows:

> Reality: The following scenes depict a reenactment of paranormal activity that was actually reported and documented by the people involved. While the people in these scenes are

professional actors and actresses, the characters that they portray are real.

Fiction: The following scenes depict paranormal activity that was never actually reported or documented. The characters shown in these scenes and the events that occur are purely fictitious and are presented only for your entertainment.

Impossible: The following scenes depict paranormal activity that was never actually reported or documented. The events that occur in these scenes are impossible from a scientific standpoint in that they contradict the known laws of nature. There is no evidence that these events---or any other events of a similar nature have ever actually happened.

In a fourth condition, no message of any kind appeared prior to the program. Participants in a control condition watched an episode of Perfect Strangers (a situation-comedy) that contained no reference to paranormal activity.

The episode of Beyond Reality involved a married couple that had been estranged for many years. But after the husband's spirit visits the wife through astral-projection and appears as a large ghostly image in her office, the wife manages to successfully astral-project her own spirit to a cliff, where her husband is about to commit suicide. When the wife has difficulty projecting her spirit back to her body, the husband's spirit helps her to a safe journey. In the final scene, they agree to try to make their marriage work again.

Following the video, the experimenter returned and requested that the participants respond to some questions. The first portion of the questionnaire asked about the various commercials that had appeared in the program. These questions were designed to continue the disguise of the true purpose of the investigation. Following these questions, participants responded to the same thirty items on paranormal activity that had been completed several weeks earlier. Participants were also asked to report their own idea about the purpose of the experiment. Finally, in the first three conditions, participants were asked to report their recollection of the narrator's comments just prior to the beginning of the program. Six participants were unable to correctly report the nature of the narrator's comments and were subsequently dropped from any analyses.

Three weeks after the conclusion of the experiment, the experimenter returned to the participants' class and asked everyone to complete a subset of the thirty items on paranormal activity once again.[4] After these questionnaires had been completed, a full debriefing took place. Those who were not present at this session were informed later about the purpose of the experiment and referred to the experimenter if they had questions.

Measure of Paranormal Beliefs

Two weeks prior to program viewing and immediately following program viewing, the 25-item "Parnormal Belief Scale" (Jones, Russell, & Nickel, 1977) and the "Psi" and "Spiritualism" subscales (4-items each) from Tobacyk & Milford's (1983) "Paranormal Scale" were administered. (Since three of Tobacyk & Milford's items were virtually identical to Jones' items, there was a total of thirty

items administered.) A subset of these thirty items was administered three weeks following viewing (see note #4). The "Parnormal Belief Scale" has high test-retest reliability (r = .92) and Jones et al. (1977) report evidence for concurrent and construct validity. Similarly, the reliability for the two subscales was adequate (Psi: r = .84; Spiritualism: r = .66). For all items, participants indicated the extent of their agreement on a scale that ranged from "1" to "5." The labels corresponding with these numbers were, "strong disagreement," "disagreement," "don't know," "agreement," and "strong agreement," respectively.

Of the thirty items that were used to assess paranormal beliefs, seven items were singled out as ones that would be most likely to be affected by the program, Beyond Reality. These items are marked accordingly in Table 1. Cronbach's alpha for these seven items on the first administration was .80, indicating an internally consistent measure. The remaining 23-items on paranormal beliefs asked about very specific phenomena that were not depicted in Beyond Reality and thus, were less likely to be affected by exposure to the program (e.g., palm reading, casting spells, the Loch Ness monster, etc.).

RESULTS

Prevalence of Paranormal Beliefs

The responses to the paranormal belief items from the initial questionnaire were used to construct frequency tables that provided some descriptive insight on the prevalence of paranormal beliefs among the participants in the study. Table 1 displays the percentages of respondents who either agreed, disagreed, or were

undecided about each item. As the table reveals, belief in paranormal phenomena was quite common among the study's participants.

Insert Table 1 About Here

For example, nearly one-third of the respondents indicated belief in astral-projection, and almost 70% of the respondents indicated belief in ghosts or spirits. Moreover, about one-fourth of the respondents expressed belief in psychokinesis, and slightly less than half indicated belief in ESP. These results parallel those reported by Gallup and Newport (1991) in a random sample of Americans.

Effects of Prior Information

In order to examine the possible effects of the disclaimers and the truth claim that were presented just prior to the episode of Beyond Reality, a paranormal belief change score was computed for each participant. The score on the 7-item scale taken before viewing was subtracted from the corresponding score taken just after viewing. As a result of this procedure, any increase in paranormal beliefs after the program would be revealed by a positive score. Any decrease in paranormal beliefs would be revealed by a negative score. A one-way ANOVA for unequal cell-sizes across the five experimental conditions was computed on the change scores. The results of this analysis revealed a significant main effect for the manipulation of prior information [$F(4,106) = 2.72$, $p < .03$; $eta^2 = .09$].[5] Post-hoc comparisons on the means revealed that participants

who viewed the program with no prior information of any type (M = 1.59) were significantly more likely to report increased paranormal beliefs when compared to the participants who viewed the program in the impossible condition (M = -2.04). For this analysis, the power to detect significant relationships for small (r = .10), medium (r = .25), and large (r = .40) effect sizes was .11, .52, and .93, respectively (Cohen, 1988). Table 2 displays the full results of this analysis.

Insert Table 2 About Here

Because there was significant attrition of participants 3-weeks later (see note #4), the same analysis reported above, which employed the measure of paranormal beliefs taken immediately after the program was over, was also computed again using only the participants who responded to the questionnaire 3-weeks later. This analysis revealed that the results for the reduced number of participants did not differ from the larger group in terms of the effects of the manipulation immediately after viewing [$F(4,74) = 3.40$, $p < .02$; $eta^2 = .15$]. Table 3 displays the full results of this analysis.

Insert Table 3 About Here

In order to assess the longevity of the effects revealed in the above analyses, change scores were similarly computed using the measure of paranormal beliefs assessed 3-weeks after participants

had viewed the program. This analysis produced a pattern of means that was similar to those reported immediately after viewing [$F(4,74) = 2.38$, $p < .06$; $eta^2 = .10$]. For this analysis, the power to detect significant relationships for small ($r = .10$), medium ($r = .25$), and large ($r = .40$) effect sizes was .09, .38, and .81, respectively (Cohen, 1988). Table 4 displays the full results of this analysis.

Insert Table 4 About Here

Discussion

The results of the initial questionnaire indicated that paranormal beliefs were widespread among this particular sample of college students. These findings are typical when compared to other recent surveys of paranormal beliefs in college student populations (Tobacyk, et al., 1988). It is interesting to note the significant proportion of respondents who indicated uncertainty about the various paranormal belief items (see Table 1). For issues on which beliefs are uncertain, it is reasonable to assume that there may be more opportunity for media influence than for issues on which beliefs are already strong.

The results of the experiment provided evidence for the fact that media depictions of a paranormal event may have an impact on viewers' paranormal beliefs. Specifically, the findings indicated that the use of a disclaimer message before the program tended to reduce beliefs in the paranormal, while the use of no message at all

tended to increase these beliefs. It could be that the use of a strong disclaimer forces viewers to process program content with the idea firmly in mind that the depictions are not true. But the data indicate that the type of disclaimer used may also be important. The message that highlighted the impossibility of the depicted events tended to cause a greater reduction in paranormal beliefs, even though the fiction message also caused a significant reduction relative to the no message condition (see Tables 2 & 3).

Interestingly, the use of a "truth claim" did not result in increased beliefs in paranormal activity. In fact, the mean indicated a tendency for viewers in this condition to decrease their paranormal beliefs slightly. It could be that the appearance of any message prior to a paranormal depiction--even one that affirms the veracity of the events--serves to focus attention on the possibility that the depicted events are deserving of some doubt. As suggested earlier, it may be that these results could be understood in terms of the ELM model of persuasion (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). The truth claim might function to increase motivation to think about the veracity of the paranormal depiction in the program, leading viewers to more carefully evaluate the credibility of the depiction. Such an evaluative stance might tend to result in more skepticism about whether or not the depicted paranormal events actually occurred. It may also tend to motivate viewers to engage in a more "central route" processing that relies less on the visual depictions and other "peripheral cues" of a televised drama.

Surprisingly, the effects of the experimental manipulation showed some signs of persisting up to 3-weeks after the program was

viewed. The direction of the means for each condition was similar to that observed immediately after viewing, and the effect size in this analysis was nearly the same as the one from the analysis of immediate effects (eta^2 = .09 vs. .10). This evidence suggests that viewers who watch programs that feature paranormal activity may be influenced in their paranormal beliefs for weeks after viewing.

The use of a pretest-posttest design for this study carried the risk that participants would become sensitized to the purpose of the investigation. With this possibility in mind, several steps were taken to minimize this risk and there was evidence in favor of the notion that most participants were not aware of the purpose of the study, even after they had completed the post-program questionnaire. The value of the pretest in the present study was to obtain a descriptive assessment of paranormal beliefs among a sample of college students that was unaffected by exposure to the experimental video.

While replication and extension of these results will be important (as with any scientific finding), the data from this study do suggest that there is merit in the widespread claims of scientists and skeptics that the media exert some influence in the domain of paranormal beliefs. This study draws particular attention to the nature of any disclaimers or truth claims that are made about paranormal depictions. The results suggest that the impact of a dramatic depiction of paranormal activity on viewers' beliefs may be very different depending upon the presence or absence of a disclaimer.

In one sense, the effects of media depictions of paranormal activity may not seem to carry the social importance of other media effects that have been reported in the literature over the years. For example, the effects of viewing violence on subsequent aggressive behavior (Huesmann & Eron, 1986) are often dramatic and carry social consequences that few would deny (but, see Freedman, 1984). Nevertheless, it seems apparent that after reflecting upon the potential implications of media impact on paranormal beliefs, there is a great deal at stake. The ability to correctly discern whether or not a given phenomenon really exists, strikes at the very heart of the human endeavor. In the age of electronic communication, the long-used (and deeply ingrained) principle of "seeing is believing" may be increasingly inadequate as an epistemological standard. This is not to suggest that extraordinary and incomprehensible events never actually occur. But it seems important to be able to correctly discern if, and when, they do. And it seems especially important that we do not accept the veracity of such events just because they are witnessed on television. Hopefully, the study presented here will serve as an initial step toward a more comprehensive understanding of how televised depictions of paranormal events function to influence our judgments about the events that actually take place in the real world.

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Footnotes

[1]One obvious need in the study of the potential for the media to influence paranormal beliefs is systematic content analysis of current media offerings. Casual observation reveals that with the advent of cable television, there has been an increase in the frequency of messages that deal with paranormal claims. For example, in the last several months, cable networks have begun to sell commercial time to "psychics" and "fortune tellers" who encourage viewers to call a 900-number in order to obtain their "professional" advice. In addition, with the proliferation of cable channels, it appears that programs dealing with paranormal themes may also have increased.

[2]The effects of motivation to scrutinize a message on subsequent attitude change are well documented and understood within the context of the elaboration likelihood model of persuasion (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Persuasion that occurs when respondents are not highly motivated to scrutinize a message is characterized as a process that is influenced by "peripheral cues." In the present case, it may be possible to conceptualize the visual features of televised accounts of paranormal events as peripheral cue content.

[3]Preliminary analyses revealed that sex was not related to any of the dependent measures of interest in the study. Consequently, it does not appear as a factor in any of the main analyses reported in the results.

[4]Unfortunately, because these data were collected during a class period, there were strict time limits for the session. Only a small number of paranormal belief items could be included in the

questionnaire. Consequently, two of the items that were used on the 7-item scale reported in the results, were not measured three weeks later. An abbreviated 4-item measure was used instead for the analysis of longer-term effects (Cronbach's alpha = .81). Of the 111 participants who were included in the analysis of immediate program exposure, 32 were not present during this final phase of data-collection. This produced an "N" of 79 for the analyses of long-term effects (males: n = 24; females: n = 55).

[5]In any experiment of this type, one threat to internal validity is the possibility that participants were aware of the general purpose of the study and, subsequently, modified their responses. In order to guard against this threat, a particularly conservative course was followed. First, the inclusion of questions about the commercial messages in the episode of Beyond Reality were designed to obscure the focus on paranormal beliefs. Second, the inclusion of a "hypothesis guess" question at the end of the study revealed that no participant even suspected that the disclaimer information had been manipulated in any way. Third, in response to the "hypothesis guess" question, if a respondent even mentioned that he/she thought the study was about paranormal beliefs, his/her data were not included in the analyses. Most participants expressed the belief that the study was concerned with recall of commercial messages. This procedure yielded an N = 111 for the major analyses (males: n = 33; females: n = 78).

Table 1

Percentages of Respondents Indicating Agreement, Disagreement, or Uncertainty About Paranormal Beliefs

Item	Agree	Undecided	Disagree
*Mind or soul can leave body and travel (astral-projection)	30.0%	35.3%	34.8%
*Psychic phenomena are real and should be studied scientifically	42.2%	25.1%	32.7%
UFO sightings are either other forms of physical phenomena (such as weather balloons) or hallucinations	24.6%	28.9%	46.6%
The Abominable Snowman of Tibet really exists	12.3%	31.0%	56.7%
I firmly believe that ghosts or spirits do exist	69.0%	13.4%	17.7%
Black magic really exists and should be dealt with in a serious manner	32.1%	35.3%	32.6%
Witches and warlocks do exist	34.8%	25.1%	40.2%
Only the uneducated or the demented believe in the supernatural and occult	14.5%	7.0%	78.7%
Through psychic individuals, it is possible to communicate with the dead	15.0%	39.6%	45.4%
I believe the Loch Ness monster of Scotland exists	21.4%	29.4%	49.2%
Once a person dies, his/her spirit may come back from time to time in the form of a ghost	48.1%	24.1%	27.8%
Some individuals are able to levitate (lift objects) through mysterious mental forces	24.6%	34.8%	40.6%
Telling the future through palm reading represents the beliefs of foolish and unreliable persons	36.9%	23.5%	39.5%

(table continues)

Table 1 (continued)

Item	Agree	Undecided	Disagree
I am firmly convinced that reincarnation has been occurring throughout history and that it will continue to occur	27.3%	28.9%	43.8%
I firmly believe that on some occasions, I can read another person's mind via ESP (extrasensory perception)	34.2%	18.7%	47.1%
ESP is an unusual gift and should not be confused with elaborate tricks used by entertainers	43.9%	27.3%	28.9%
#*Ghosts and witches do exist outside the realm of imagination	43.8%	27.3%	28.9%
*Supernatural phenomena should become part of scientific study	34.8%	31.0%	34.3%
#*All of the reports of "scientific proof" of psychic phenomena are strictly sensationalism with no factual basis	18.1%	38.5%	43.3%
It is possible to cast spells on individuals	13.4%	26.7%	59.9%
With proper training, anyone could learn to read other people's minds	15.0%	26.2%	58.8%
It is advisable to consult your horoscope daily	11.2%	17.1%	71.7%
Plants can sense the feelings of humans through a form of ESP	11.2%	36.4%	52.4%
ESP has been scientifically proven to exist	9.1%	61.0%	30.0%
#*Many phenomena (such as ESP) will one day be proven to exist	62.6%	19.3%	18.2%
Psychokinesis, the movement of objects through psychic powers, does occur	26.7%	39.6%	33.6%

(table continues)

Table 1 (continued)

A person's thoughts can influence the movement of a physical object.....	16.1%	44.9%	39.1%
Mind reading is not possible.....	22.0%	26.2%	51.9%
Many special persons have the ability to predict the future.....	36.9%	25.7%	37.4%
*During altered states, such as sleep or trances, the spirit can leave the body.....	26.7%	32.1%	41.2

Note: Percentages are based on 187 respondents for each item. "Strongly" agree and "agree" are combined into one category for this table. "Strongly" disagree and "disagree" are similarly combined. "*" designates items on the 7-item scale. "#" designates an item that was omitted on the measure 3-weeks after program viewing.

Table 2

Mean Change Scores in Paranormal Beliefs Immediately Following Exposure to a Televised Depiction of Paranormal Events

Reality	Fiction	Impossible	No Message	Control
$-.96_{ab}$	-1.58_{ab}	-2.04_{a}	$+1.59_{b}$	$-.82_{ab}$
(n=23)	(n=19)	(n=25)	(n=22)	(n=22)

Note: Means having no subscript in common differ at $p < .05$ according to the Newman-Keuls post-comparison procedure. Negative scores reflect reports of decreased paranormal belief after the program, relative to beliefs measured two weeks earlier.

Table 3

Replication Analysis of Table 2 Means With Participants Who Also Responded 3-Weeks After Viewing

Reality	Fiction	Impossible	No Message	Control
$-.25_{b}$	-1.93_{ab}	-2.79_{a}	$+1.23_{bc}$	$-.50_{ab}$
(n=16)	(n=15)	(n=19)	(n=13)	(n=16)

Note: Means having no subscript in common differ at $p < .05$ according to the Newman-Keuls post-comparison procedure. Negative scores reflect reports of decreased paranormal belief after the program, relative to beliefs measured two weeks earlier.

Table 4

Mean Change Scores in Paranormal Beliefs Three-Weeks Following Exposure to a Televised Depiction of Paranormal Events

Reality	Fiction	Impossible	No Message	Control
-1.88_{ab}	-2.73_{a}	-1.58_{a}	$+ .54_{b}$	$-.44_{ab}$
(n=16)	(n=15)	(n=19)	(n=13)	(n=16)

Note: Means having no subscript in common differ at $p < .05$ according to the Newman-Keuls post-comparison procedure. Negative scores reflect reports of decreased paranormal beliefs 3-weeks after the program, relative to beliefs measured two weeks prior to program exposure.

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Local Cable Television Commentary, Boosterism and Community Ties: A Case Study of Council Bluffs, Iowa 1989-90*

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June 3, 1993

* This paper was accepted for presentation to the Radio-Television Journalism Division, Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, annual conference, Kansas City, Missouri, August 14, 1993.

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A B S T R A C T

Local Cable Television Commentary, Boosterism and Community Ties: A Case Study of Council Bluffs, Iowa 1989-90

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Local cable television news is a significant new player in the field of commercial broadcasting, but we do not know much about it. It has been said that the term "hyperlocalism" best describes the local news content.

The study provided data on the degree to which this cable news department promoted the community as "booster" of official programs and actions through commenting on events in the news.

The Council Bluffs cable news commentaries provided a distinct local view of public events to the community--a community starved for such localism because of the metropolitan focus of Omaha broadcasters.

Local Cable Television Commentary, Boosterism and Community Ties: A Case Study of Council Bluffs, Iowa 1989-90

Introduction

Local cable television news is a significant new player in the field of commercial broadcasting, but we do not know much about it. It has been said that the term "hyper-localism" best describes the content generated by cable operations in the United States (Channels, Sept. 1989, p. 57), but few researchers have systematically studied local cable stations and their news-editorial functions.

Television broadcasts are likely to be a key source of information about "social reality" (Wright, 1986; Lang and Lang, 1984; Graber, 1993), but the role of local cable news is unclear. When broadcasters' coverage is "close to home," one must assume that it is more likely audience members will have mediating direct personal experiences.

This is a case study[1] of one local cable television news shop; this "field research" was designed to take an "in-depth" view of, in this case, commentary (Babbie, 1989, pp. 287-288). While generalizability is limited, case studies as exploratory devices (such as in White's 1950 study of "gatekeeping") have been fruitful (McQuail, 1987, p. 156).

The generalizability of the findings will come from the application of community press theory. This study will place the industry developments of local cable television

news within a broader theoretical perspective of community press. The functionalism of local cable television news may not be different from that of the community newspaper, which also has been judged to be neighborhood-oriented; in urban areas the community press appears to be a key source of information for civic groups (Davison, 1988, p. 13) and builds community ties through community boosterism (Stamm, 1985; and Janowitz, 1952). The study will provide data on the degree to which this cable news department promoted the community as "booster" of official programs and actions through commenting on events in the news.

This study is justified because:

-- no systematic data exist on the content of local cable television commentary broadcasts;

-- no research on local television broadcasts has considered the implications of community press theory;

-- traditional over-the-air broadcasters and community newspapers need to know more about the nature of news content provided by cable services; and

-- the editorial content of newspapers and cable broadcasters may serve the function of promoting community economic growth in the traditional sense of being a "booster" (Abbott, 1981; Boorstin, 1965).

Research on local, rather than national news, is a new development. A recent study employed the gatekeeper model and found internal organizational behavioral patterns; television reporters appeared to be passive "recipients of

story assignments from upper level news managers" (Wickham, 1989). Managers seem to sense "quality" of their newscasts, and use the assessment to make important decisions (Hayes and Mitchell, 1989). Writing, visuals, accuracy/ethics, importance and reporting appear to be the most important criteria. Perhaps not surprisingly, these values translate into rather predictable decisions about who should or should not be the featured sources for local television news; most often, the views of city officials are presented (Harmon, 1989).

Even less has been written about the content of local cable television news. New services may provide what one trade publication called "hyperlocalism," or the narrow focus on community issues:

> The new hyperlocal newscasts are bringing the home town--the daily machinations and avocations of the community--right into the living room. Think about it: If your kid wins the spelling bee or some such, he'll get more than a picture in the local weekly; he'll be interviewed on that evening's TV news (Reese, Channels, 1989, p. 60).

Cable news departments are a challenge to traditional local broadcast newsrooms facing economic pressures (Goedkoop, 1988). Could cable news become a functional replacement for community newspapers, local radio news or local television news broadcasts?

Historical commitments made by broadcasters to local issues and unexpected event coverage (Wulfemeyer, 1982), do not fill the needs of smaller communities adjacent to larger media markets for coverage of routine community affairs.

In the face of increased competition, though, some broadcast managers are striking cooperative deals with cable operators in their service areas to provide local news instead of encouraging the cable companies to start their own ventures (Broadcasting, Oct. 23, 1989, p. 81).

Mass media--particularly the community newspaper--appear to serve an important role in working with civic organizations to affect the quality of urban life (Davison, 1988). It may be that local cable news, like its predecessor the community press, helps build community ties (Stamm, 1985). It is no new idea that local community-based media may serve as a booster for community leadership (Janowitz, 1952; Park, 1929). If the values of news organizations are important in promotion of the local community, then the editorial or news commentary --where opinion is expressed--should be particularly important in the propagation of ideas in the search for community consensus. Cable offers the possibility of creating an outlet for alternative voices in a community beyond the newspaper in markets under-served by existing broadcast media.

In the case of Council Bluffs, in the shadow of the Omaha, Nebraska media market, it may mean that community news and information is less likely to exist on the public airwaves than in similar size communities not in the shadow

of a larger market (Conversation with former news director, News 17, Council Bluffs, Nov. 29, 1989). Omaha, with a metropolitan population of a half-million, is the 73rd largest television market (Broadcasting & Cable Market Place, 1992); and Council Bluffs, just across the Missouri River, is a community of 60,000 with a cable penetration rate of 70 percent (American Heritage Cablevision). Council Bluffs, Iowa was wired for cable beginning in 1979 by MSO ATC (Ibid.).

An Old Theoretical Problem, A New Technology

Community based, narrowly defined local news has been studied by researchers interested in printed media, the so-called "community press" of neighborhoods and suburbs (Janowitz, 1952). Most often such research has been centered on the reasons for using or not using media, and on the role these media play in serving as community boosters (Stamm, 1985). But the theoretical framework has not been vigorously applied to electronic media.

The notion of the booster press has been historically related to areas of rapid growth, transient populations and boom economies (Boorstin, 1965). In such instances the press could be a strong voice for business enterprise, whether the economic growth was real or imagined (Ibid., pp. 124-161). Publications might be directed for internal use to promote local spirit or external use to lure capital (Abbott, 1981). In this view, mass media may function as "publicist" for a community or region.

Literature Review

It has been suggested that community leaders are the most likely users of community oriented media (Davison, 1988, p. 16); and people who are not involved in the less formal channels of community communications are least likely to use the media (Stamm, 1985). Thus, where the audience is more specifically identified in terms of community interests, the producers of the content might adapt to meet those interests. One would expect a tighter focus on audience needs that impacts upon the content decisions made by producers.

The generalizations of the community press literature that suggest that media content can narrow or widen "knowledge gaps" between those in the know and those who are not (Tichenor, Donohue and Olien, 1980), and other research that claims media support local authority (Paletz, Reichert and McIntyre, 1971), have rarely been applied to broadcast content and never employed to study local cable news channels. More often, broadcast research is a simple application of "agenda-setting" ideas that have not progressed past the basic view that media tell people what issues to think about (McCombs and Shaw, 1972). The present study will start from the view that the role and function of mass media go beyond setting agendas to reinforcing the dominant views of local community leaders. Thus, when a new technology such as cable emerges and develops local news broadcasts, four possibilities exist:

1. the cable news department could emerge as an alternative media voice in a community;

2. the cable news department could be another voice reinforcing the existing media view of social reality;

3. the broadcasts could serve as both an alternative media voice, as well as a booster of the hyper-local community; or

4. the content could provide neither an alternative nor booster voice for the local community.

Research Questions

1. Is the content of the cable news commentary in one case study an alternative media voice? Does it serve as "booster" for the local community?

2. How much emphasis will there be on the local business community as compared to other community issues?

3. To what extent will opinion be expressed strongly, or with conditional support?

Methodology

Data Collection. Scripts from fifty-three weekly cable commentaries between January 23, 1989 and May 21, 1990 were given to the researcher by the news director at the station.[2] The copy was entered into a computer for word count analysis.[3]

Data Analysis. Three types of analysis were performed: 1) a content analysis to categorize topics using each commentary as a unit of analysis;[4] 2) a word frequency count to identify semantic components of words selected (Hart, 1984); and 3) a qualitative reading of each editorial for content and form. The news director, who

authored and presented the weekly commentary, also completed a questionnaire.[5]

The fifty-three weekly broadcasts of cable news commentary were categorized by topic using consensus decisions following preliminary decisions by two independent coders.[6]

A computer-based system of word counting for verbal style was employed (Hart, 1984). The computer was used to place terms into subdictionaries based on Hart's semantic components (Ibid., pp. 294-5):

Familiarity: these are "operation" or "direction" words (i.e. "about," "are," "be," "did," "for," "have") that are the most commonly used words in our language.

Rigidity: these are terms of "certainty" such as the words "is" and "will."

Concreteness: references to objects such as "dollar" and "home."

Leveling: terms reducing or eliminating differences such as "anybody," and "everyone," and "whole."

Collectives: "Singular nouns connoting plurality" such as "community" and "city."

Numerical frequency: numbers as specifications of fact.

Qualification: speaker's use of "conditional" or "ambivalent" words such as "could," "may" or "ought."

Self-reference: first-person pronouns as acknowledgment of the "limitations of one's opinions."

Praise: "verbal affirmations" by use of terms such as "best" and "good."

Satisfaction: "positive" words such as "love" and "hope."

Inspiration: words of "abstract virtues" such as "honor," "work" and "reason."

Adversity: "negative feelings" through words such as "bad," "crime," and "fight."

Negation: denial through terms such as "not," "no," and "don't."

Aggressiveness: "assertiveness" through terms such as "force" and "take."

Accomplishment: "completion of a task" as in the words "built" and "changed."

Communicativeness: social interaction references such as "says" and "proposed."

Intellectuality: reflectivenss in terms such as "examined" and "remembered."

Passivity: words of little activity such as "still" and "accept."

Symbolism: "the nation's sacred terms" such as "Democracy" and "people."

Spatial awareness: boundaries and distance words (i.e. "district" and "local").

Temporal awareness: time frame words such as "first," "new," and "now."

Present concern: present-tense verbs.

Past concern: past constructions of present-tense verbs.

Human interest: words such as "folks," "family," and "our."

Results

Questionnaire

The news director said he was a regular reader of the Council Bluffs *Daily Non-pareil*, Des Moines *Register*, Omaha *World-Herald* and *Wall Street Journal*. At the time of the study he was 36-years-old. The white male had attended but not completed graduate school, and he described himself as a political independent. For eight years he had covered the Iowa legislature for two television stations in Des Moines before coming to Council Bluffs to launch the cable news broadcast--originally an hour-long nightly newscast.[7] He had a total of 12 years experience in broadcast news. In response to a community ties question, he responded that while he had lived in Iowa all his professional life, his long-term plans were not to remain in the state.[8]

Content Analysis

This analysis suggested that, most often, local political squabbles in Council Bluffs were the topic for commentary by the news director. The environment, apparently a special interest of the news director, was as likely a topic for comment as local business and development issues.

Table 1 about here

Education and schools, crime topics, disasters, sports and taxes were less frequently commented upon. Human interest, energy and resources issues, and science and technology topics were rare. During the period under study, there were no references to the military.

Word Count

Beyond familiar words, there were a number of categories of words emphasized: rigidity; human interest; time frames; conditionalism; concreteness; spatial awareness and present-tense verbs.

Table 2 about here

More noteworthy is the lack of emphasis of positive words through the categories of accomplishment, praise and satisfaction. Further, negative words in the categories of negation and adversity also were not emphasized.

In the rigidity category, the most frequently used word was "is" (N=357). In the human interest category, the most frequently used word was "we" (N=203). In the concreteness category, the most frequently used word was "city" (N=108).

Use of Hart's formula for "optimism" ([praise + satisfaction + inspiration] - [adversity + negation]) yields a score of -16, indicating a lack of positive emphasis in the commentary.

Qualitative Analysis

Four specific topic areas appeared to raise community conflict and cooperation issues: business issues; taxes; public safety; and the environment.

Business Issues. In one commentary (Mar. 13, 1989), a "community betterment program" that was "designed to get businesses going," was challenged. Some jobs created were not retained, and companies appeared to exercise too much power over the city:

> BLUE STAR FOODS--EVEN THOUGH TALKS WITH CONAGRA WERE IN THE WORKS--HELD A GUN TO THE HEAD OF THE CITY AND THREATENED TO MOVE OUT UNLESS IT GOT FUNDS TO MOVE ITS CORPORATE OFFICE FROM ITS AGING FACTORY TO A NEW OFFICE BUILDING DOWNTOWN.

While identifying the city's problem, the commentary found the causes to be in the "risk in the private enterprise system," and the realization that "it is a jungle out there in the business world." The commentary called on the city to "make applicants for the money more accountable."

When a group of small business people proposed a renovation plan, the commentary topic shifted to the poor image of Council Bluffs: "Much of Omaha's impression of this city are formed by a quick trip over the bridge from downtown and what do they see? Cheap bars, decrepit buildings, dirty book stores, and junk shops" (Jul. 17, 1989):

> IN THIS CASE, I'VE GOT TO COME DOWN FOR THE MEN AND WOMEN OF VISION INVOLVED IN THIS PROJECT WHO CAN SEE AROUND THE NEXT TURN AND CAN SEE HOW THE CITY CAN KEEP FIGHTING AND CLAWING ITS WAY BACK.

The commentary called for city council and public support for the renovation plan.

The most intense community debate during the period came as Council Bluffs debated a plan to bring casino gambling to the city: Iowa's governor disagreed, and the local business community was split. Four separate commentaries on the topic were written. In the first commentary (Dec. 4, 1989), 800 new jobs were promised: "if you're a business person in this community, you are probably looking at the proverbial offer you can't refuse... after all, the city hasn't exactly been overwhelmed with offers with this many jobs involved in recent years." The commentary noted the existence of the Bluffs Run dog track, a state lottery and riverboat gambling:

> THERE ARE REAL QUESTIONS AS TO WHETHER WE SHOULD BE USING GAMBLING AS AN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT TOOL. BUT, OUR VIRTUE HAS LONG SINCE BEEN LOST AS FAR AS GAMBLING IS CONCERNED.

As the issue intensified, the second commentary on the topic (Jan. 15, 1990) isolated the division: "this proposal has really upset the apple cart as far as some long-standing relationships in the Bluffs business community are concerned."

> THESE TWO GROUPS ARE MADE UP OF THE PEOPLE WHO ARE USUALLY LINED UP ON THE SAME SIDE WHEN IT COMES TO MATTERS OF PROMOTING THE CITY. AND THEN OTHERS, SUCH AS BLUFFS MAYOR TOM HANAFAN, ARE CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE.

The commentary, also, refused to take a side: "the odds are still a little unstable as to how it will turn out."

In the third gambling commentary (Apr. 23, 1990), a consultant report was examined:

> IT BORE OUT NEITHER THE ROSY PROJECTIONS OF ECONOMIC PROSPERITY BEING PUSHED BY THE BACKERS OF THE CASINO, NOR THE DIRE PREDICTIONS OF HUGE INCREASES IN CRIME OR THE KNELL OF THE BLUFFS RUN DOG TRACK. YES, IT WOULD MEAN MORE JOBS... AND, YES BLUFFS RUN WOULD SUFFER A DROP IN BUSINESS--30 TO 40 PERCENT.

While the commentary called on the city to make a decision: "The worst thing that could happen would be for the council to do nothing and wait for the problem to go away."

When the Omaha World-Herald opposed the casino plan in an editorial, the Council Bluff's cable outlet responded in commentary (May 21, 1990). The commentary accused the paper in perpetuating "the mindset" about Council Bluffs:

> THAT IS, STAY OVER THERE ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE RIVER IN IOWA AND DON'T BOTHER US WITH ANYTHING THAT MIGHT COST US ANY TAX DOLLARS OR CUT INTO ANY PROFITS BEING MADE BY BUSINESSES ON THE NEBRASKA SIDE OF THE RIVER.

The commentary continued: "the Omaha World-Herald continues to show its lack of understanding about the way things work on this side of the river."

The Council Bluffs image was the topic of still another commentary (Jan. 29, 1990): "Council Bluffs sometimes has the unenviable reputation as a city to be made fun of... particularly by Omaha residents looking for something to sneer at..." The issue surfaced after a Council Bluffs city council member wore a Lone Ranger costume to a meeting: "He

is obligated to speak for what he thinks is the proper side of an issue. But this should not include making a spectacle of the process wearing Halloween costumes." The commentary also cited "grisly details of love letters" between the sheriff and a former 9-1-1 dispatcher that had been made public:

> AS A CITY FIGHTING BACK TO REBUILD A REPUTATION AS A CENTER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY, AS A NICE PLACE TO LIVE, AS A PLACE TO MOVE TO AND NOT MOVE FROM, WE DON'T NEED THESE KINDS OF THINGS I'VE JUST TALKED ABOUT.

In seven of the fifty-three commentaries, the business community surfaced as a topic of concern.

Taxes. Three commentaries dealt specifically with taxes. One of the commentaries criticized a plan to offer Bluffs Run tax exemptions (May 8, 1989).

A second commentary focused a proposed one-cent local option sales tax (Aug. 21, 1989):

> IT IS ESTIMATED THERE ARE ABOUT 53-MILLION DOLLARS WORTH OF REPAIRS AND CONSTRUCTION NEEDED ON THE CITY'S AGED, DECREPIT, AND INADEQUATE SEWER SYSTEM. IT'S GOING TO HAVE TO BE FIXED IF THE CITY WANTS TO GROW OR EVEN STAY ABOUT WHERE IT IS.

The commentary supported the tax increase, but noted that "the idea has to be sold if it is to have a chance." A second local option tax commentary followed (Dec. 18, 1989): "in something of a first, the tax has the backing of the Bluffs Chamber of Commerce and the Council Bluffs Business Association, two groups which have been at odds in the past."

Public Safety. The occasion of the station winning an Associated Press award for an investigation of 9-1-1 problems, led to a commentary on the role of media (May 15, 1989): "Now we didn't exactly make ourselves popular with a lot of people in officialdom... no one likes to have critical things said about them... but in this country the news media, no matter whether you think us saints or scum, serve a quasi-official duty as public watchdog."

The issue of the need for an enhanced 9-1-1 system prompted another commentary (Sep. 11, 1989). The station, as expected, supported the need for an improved system.

When area news media focused on the case of a hunter charged with shooting a wandering moose, the commentator said: "the outrage over this act is at as a high a level as I've seen in my three years in the Bluffs" (Oct. 23, 1989). He continued, "But before we worry about the poor moose, let's think about the woman battered, beaten, and abused who is recovering tonight in a local hospital."

When taxpayers were left with a $95,000 settlement bill in the sex discrimination case against the sheriff, the commentator thought something was amiss: "We suggest that Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County simply garnish his wages for the remainder of his term" (Mar. 12, 1990).

Local law enforcement concerns about a children's reformatory led to a news investigation and follow-up commentary Apr. 17, 1990): "one has to wonder whether a kid sent to Children's Square by the juvenile court for stealing cars or selling drugs will have his or her life turned

around by knowing which fork to use or how to properly walk with your date to the punch bowl." He added, "Children's Square is not a bad institution--it's a good one but also one which can be a lot better."

The first anniversary of a tornado that ravaged Council Bluffs (Jul. 10, 1989), led to a commentary reminding the public of the mayor's "outstanding leadership," and of the failure of the Iowa governor to come to the scene quickly. The commentary remembered "the sense of community in the aftermath of the storm... the city made the best of it and, I think, grew a little closer as a result."

Environment. Environmental issues surfaced in three of the commentaries. In one, concerns were expressed about nuclear power (there is a nuclear plant on the Nebraska side of the river), the dangers of pesticides, the ozone problem and safe drinking water (Mar. 27, 1989).

Increases in gas prices led to reminders about previous oil shortages: "Spanish philosopher George Santayana said those who ignore history are doomed to repeat it" (Apr. 17, 1989).

And, a recycling program in Council Bluffs was labeled "revolutionary" (Apr. 30, 1990). The commentary encouraged public support: "Let's get behind the recycling effort... and good luck with putting the project in motion."

Other. The qualitative review of topic categories of the commentaries also identified one on the ten-year anniversary of the visit of Pope John Paul the Second to Iowa (Oct. 2,

1989). "In 1979," the news director wrote, "I was a young reporter for WHO radio in Des Moines, my first job outside my home town in Tennessee." He remembered the Pope's message: "farmers in the midwest were the stewards of the land in the most productive agricultural area in the world, and as steward, were obligated to care for it as a resource through soil conservation and other means of preserving what he called God's gift to us."

Conclusions

The Council Bluffs cable news commentaries provided a distinct local view of public events to the community--a community apparently starved for such localism because of the metropolitan focus of Omaha broadcasters.

Additionally, the news commentaries appeared to look for consensus-building in local decision-making. Conflicts were reported as solvable. The view, while often critical of local conditions, painted a rather optimistic-conditional portrait of what could be.

Often, Council Bluffs was seen as working together as a community against *outside* forces -- primarily in Des Moines and Omaha. Self-determination was seen as a value. In answer to the specific research questions posed:

1. Is the content of the cable news commentary in one case study an alternative media voice? Does it serve as "booster" for the local community?

The boosterism, where it existed in the commentaries, was present in terms of Council Bluffs's relationship to outside communities in Des Moines and Omaha. However,

internal Council Bluffs conflicts were discussed and challenged--often times these local squabbles were portrayed as adding to the city's image problem with outsiders.

2. How much emphasis will there be on the local business community as compared to other community issues?

A number of commentaries dealt with local conditions, but these topics were not treated as frequently as local political issues and environmental issues.

3. To what extent will opinion be expressed strongly, or with conditional support?

The commentary appeared to rarely take strong positions on controversial issues. Rather, the commentaries appeared to analyze "both sides" of issues and call for quick decision-making by community power-brokers. In short, the commentaries suggested not only the station, but also its viewers, should defer to the elite power structure in the community.

The present study suggests that the role of local media in building community consensus is far more complex than is suggested in the traditional community press literature. More research needs to be done to identify the role and function of new electronic media players on the community press landscape.

As major markets establish 24-hour local cable news operations (Broholm, 1992), and regional-suburban entities (Brown, 1993), it is clear that we will need to know more about the nature of the broadcasts.

In the case of Council Bluffs, residents live in the shadow of Omaha, removed by distance from their state capital at Des Moines. It is clear that a cable news department--providing news and commentary--offers the potential to help define community identity.

Notes

1. Babbie (1989) discusses case studies in his chapter on field research: "Field observation differs from some other models of observation in that it is not only a data-collecting activity. Frequently, perhaps typically, it is theory-generating activity as well," p. 261. Of course, generalizability is sacrificed: "because field researchers get a full and in-depth view of their subject matter, they can reach an unusually comprehensive understanding. By its very comprehensiveness, however, this understanding is less generalizable than results based on rigorous sampling and standardized measurements," pp. 287-288.

2. It should be noted that in June 1990 the news director was replaced, and commentaries were discontinued at the station. The station, however, has continued to offer a 30 minute nightly newscast focusing on Council Bluffs events.

3. The "grep" program was modified by a local computer consultant to list all words alphabetically with frequency of references. A copy is available, free of charge, from the researcher.

4. Here we distinguish the words as units of analysis in the word count from the weekly commentaries where the words appear.

5. The questionnaire data was completed as part of a separate study of news practitioners in the Omaha media market.

6. The original agreement between the two independent coders was 64 percent. Most of the consensus was reached by re-evaluating the local politics, social issues, business development and environment categories. The resulting *pattern* of category frequencies remained similar.

7. Prior to the dismissal of the news director, the cable company made significant budget cuts that led to changing the hour-long newscast to 30 minutes. That news broadcast continued to air at the time of this writing in March 1993. However, it should be noted that the sale of the cable operation is now pending.

8. Most of his professional experience was in Des Moines as a legislative reporter.

Table 1
Topical Categories of Commentaries

Topic	N	Percent
Domestic and local politics	14	26.3
The environment	6	11.3
Trade, business and development	6	11.3
Education and schools	5	9.4
Crime and the courts	4	7.5
Accidents and disasters	3	5.7
Social issues (i.e. abortion)	3	5.7
Sports	3	5.7
Foreign affairs	3	5.7
Economics and taxes	2	3.8
Culture, religion	1	1.9
Energy and natural resources	1	1.9
Lifestyle, feature, human interest	1	1.9
Science and technology	1	1.9
Military issues	0	0.0
	53	100.0

Table 2
Frequencies of Words by Category

Subdictionary	N	Percent
Familiar or common words	5,536	38.2
Certainty or rigidity	1,110	7.7
Human interest	878	6.1
Time frames	873	6.1
Conditional, ambivalent terms	848	5.8
Concreteness, physical, geographical	807	5.6
Collectives, plurality	739	5.1
Spatial awareness	678	4.7
Present-tense verbs	475	3.3
Accomplishment	425	2.9
Negation	299	2.1
Numerical specification	261	1.8
Leveling of differences, distinctiveness	248	1.7
Self-references	162	1.1
Reflective, cerebral references	161	1.1
Praise	157	1.1
Past-tense verbs	156	1.1
Inspiration	154	1.1
Social interaction, communication	150	1.0
Symbolic words	114	0.8
Adversity	80	0.5
Aggressiveness	71	0.4
Passivity	70	0.4
Satisfaction	52	0.3
	14,504	100.0

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